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After 286 days, Sunita's space odyssey ends with homecoming

Wilmore, Sunita were stuck at ISS after flawed Boeing mission

CAPE CANAVERAL, 19 MARCH

Stuck in space no more, NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams returned to Earth on Tuesday, hitching a different ride home to close out a saga that began with a bungled test flight more than nine months ago.

Their SpaceX capsule parachuted into the Gulf of Mexico, just hours after departing the International Space Station. Splashdown occurred off the coast of Tallahassee in the Florida Panhandle.

It all started with a flawed Boeing test flight last spring.

The two expected to be gone just a week or so after launching on Boeing's new Starliner crew capsule on 5 June.

Wilmore and Williams ended up spending 286 days in space — 278 days longer than anticipated when they launched. They circled Earth 4,576 times and travelled 195 million km by the time of splashdown.

Dolphins circled the capsule as divers readied it for hoisting onto the recovery ship. Once safely on board, the side hatch was opened and the astronauts were helped out, one by one. Williams was next-to-last out, followed by Wilmore who gave two gloved thumbs-up.

Wilmore and Williams' plight captured the world's attention, giving new meaning to the phrase "stuck at work" and turning "Butch and Suni" into household names. While other astronauts had logged longer spaceflights over the decades, none had to deal with so much uncertainty.

Wilmore and Williams quickly transitioned from guests to full-fledged station crew members, conducting experiments, fixing equipment and even spacewalking together.

Williams became the station's commander three months into their stay and held the post until earlier this month. Wilmore and Williams will have to wait until they're off the SpaceX recovery ship and flown to Houston before reuniting with their loved ones. The three NASA astronauts will be checked out by flight surgeons as they adjust to gravity, officials said, and allowed to go home after several days. —*PTI*

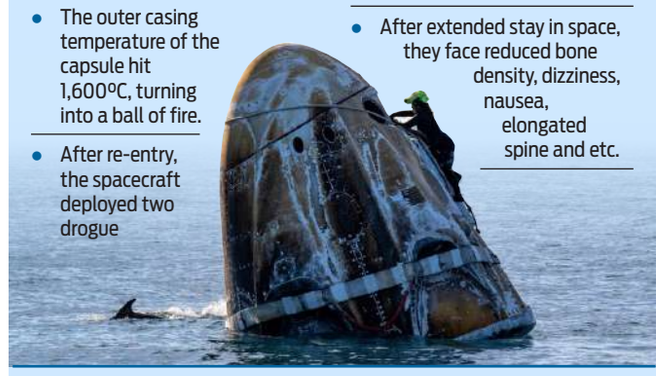
>>>More on Pages 4, 5 & 6

A SpaceX capsule carrying NASA astronauts Sunita Williams, Butch Wilmore and Nick Hague, and Russian cosmonaut Alexander Gorbunov splashes down in the Gulf of Mexico ***PHOTO: PTI***

> **India's daughter Sunita Williams and her fellow astronauts have inspired everyone with their perseverance, dedication and never-say-die spirit.**
>
> —Droupadi Murmu, President

ALL ABOUT THE SPLASHDOWN

- Astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore return to Earth after 9 months in space.
- Splashdown off the coast of Florida at 5.57 pm (3.27 am IST).
- 17-hour journey back to Earth from space.
- The SpaceX Dragon capsule re-entered Earth at a speed of 28,800 km/h.
- The outer casing temperature of the capsule hit 1,600ºC, turning into a ball of fire.
- After re-entry, the spacecraft deployed two drogue parachutes to stabilise. Then, minutes before splashdown, the spacecraft deployed four additional parachutes to slow down and achieve the target speed of 25 km/h.
- The capsule then landed into Gulf of Mexico.
- The astronauts will undergo a 45-day rehabilitation programme to prepare for gravity.
- After extended stay in space, they face reduced bone density, dizziness, nausea, elongated spine and etc.



RECORDS ACHIEVED

Williams made history for the most time spent performing spacewalks by a woman. She spent a total of **62 hours and 6 minutes** outside her spacecraft.

THE INDIA CONNECT

William's father Deepak Pandya was a neuroanatomist from Gujarat. Williams has visited India 3 times, including in 2007 and 2013. She was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2008.

PHOTO: PTI

Fadnavis vows to dig out rioters from graves

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

In a stern warning to perpetrators of Nagpur violence, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday said attackers of police will be "dug out from their graves" and made to face the law. "Those who attacked police during the arson in Nagpur will be dug out from their graves. Attacks on police are unpardonable. They will get the strictest punishment. We won't spare them," Fadnavis said in the Assembly while replying to a debate on the Budgetary demands of the Home department. Mobs went on a rampage on Monday night in central Nagpur areas, damaging vehicles, hurling petrol bombs and stones at police, injuring 33 including 3 DCP ranked officers, and attacking houses. Rumours about a 'chadar' with holy inscriptions being burnt during protests led by VHP for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, located in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district, was the prima facie trigger for violence. —*PTI*

DMK moves court to halt ED probe on TASMAC

CHENNAI, 19 MARCH

The DMK Government has moved the Madras High Court against the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) investigation into the alleged scam involving the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation Ltd (TASMAC) claiming that the central agency exceeded its authority and infringed upon the state's autonomy, thus igniting a new dispute on federal powers. The Tamil Nadu government filed the writ petition in court this week, seeking a writ of mandamus and declaration to invalidate the probe into Tasmac, which holds a monopoly over liquor sales in the state. The state has contended that ED's investigation which began with raids on Tasmac's Chennai headquarters from 6-8 March, lacks legal basis The petition claims the searches were conducted without proper warrants, officials held for extended periods and documents held in violation of due process. The petition alleged that officials including women were unlawfully detained and said absence of any evidence linking Tasmac to any "proceeds of crime" as defined by the Prevention of Money Laundering Act , 2002 calling ED's actions baseless 'roving enquiry'. —*Agencies*

SPARROWS' DAY OUT

Sparrows spotted in Bengaluru on Wednesday in a rare sighting, a day ahead of International Sparrow Day. The day draws attention to the alarming decline in sparrow populations across India. Urbanisation, habitat loss, pesticide use and a lack of nesting sites have contributed to the disappearance of house sparrows from Bengaluru ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

K'taka passes resolution against Waqf Bill

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

The Karnataka Assembly on Wednesday passed a resolution against the Centre's Waqf (Amendment) Bill amid walkout by the opposition BJP. The resolution was moved by the Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil.

He said the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), set up to study the amendments to the law, acted "unilaterally and arbitrarily", disregarding the longstanding traditions of Parliament and "failing" to consider the views of the opposition members.

Despite objections from the Karnataka State Waqf Board and other stakeholders against the amendment, the Centre chose to present the bill unilaterally, which has now been introduced in Parliament, the Minister added.

"The proposed amendment to the Waqf Act encroaches and curtails the executive and legislative powers of the state government. The proposed amendment is against the principles of "Principle of Equity, Equality and Parity". Therefore, the proposed amendment is ultra vires," Patil said.

The BJP MLAs voiced their opposition to the resolution and called it height of appeasement ***PHOTO: PTI***

"This House unanimously urges the Central Government to take immediate action to respect the unanimous views of the country by immediately withdrawing the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which contains provisions that violate the fundamental principles of the Constitution."

The BJP MLAs voiced their opposition to the resolution and called it "height of appeasement".

"We oppose the resolution. This government favours Pakistan and this is height of Muslim appeasement," a BJP legislator said. The opposition leader R Ashoka accused the ruling Congress of "turning a blind eye" to the suffering of farmers whose land records were altered in favour of the Waqf Board. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Ration cards not helping poor: SC fumes at states

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Observing that ration cards have become a "popularity card", the Supreme Court on Wednesday wondered if the benefits meant for the poor percolated to undeserving persons.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh said the benefit of subsidies should reach the genuine beneficiaries while hearing a plea in a suo motu case initiated during the COVID19 pandemic to address the miseries of migrant labourers.

"These states just say we have issued these many cards. There are some states who when they have to show their development they say our per capita income is growing. And then when we talk of BPL, they say 75 per cent of the population is BPL. How can these facts be reconciled? We have to ensure that benefits reach the genuine beneficiaries." Justice Kant said.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for some intervenors, said the anomaly stemmed from the inequalities in the income of people. "\The rich continue to be getting richer while the poor remain poor," he said. Bhushan claimed that around 8 crore poor migrant workers, who are registered in the e-shram portal of the government, need to be given free ration adding since the Centre did not conduct the 2021 census, it was still relying on 2011 census and claimed that around 10 crore people, requiring free ration, remained out of the BPL categories. The Centre said the government was giving free ration to around 81.35 crore people under the National Food Security Act. —*PTI*

4 ARRESTED

Woman tied to tree, assaulted for stealing fish in Udupi

UDUPI, 19 MARCH

Four people were arrested for allegedly tying a woman to a tree and assaulting her after accusing her of stealing fish, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred on 18 March and the videos of the alleged assault went viral on social media, they said.

In the purported videos, a woman is seen slapping the victim while a crowd stands by. The victim was later tied to a tree and assaulted again. Despite the public humiliation, no one intervened to stop it, according to police sources.

Udupi Superintendent of Police Arun K said the victim, a resident of Vijayanagara, was accused by locals of stealing fish. The woman who allegedly assaulted her has been identified as Laxmi Bai. Along with her, three others -- Sunder, Shilpa, and another individual -- were arrested.

Responding to queries from reporters, Udupi Deputy Commissioner Vidya Kumari K said an FIR has been registered.

She condemned the assault, stating that such acts are unacceptable both legally and morally.

"Whether or not the woman committed any wrongdoing is under investigation, but assaulting someone publicly is inhuman. It is even more disturbing that bystanders laughed and failed to intervene," she remarked. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- Udupi Superintendent of Police Arun K said the victim was accused by locals of stealing fish.

Farmers evicted from Shambhu, leaders detained

CHANDIGARH, 19 MARCH

Several farmer leaders including Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal were detained in Mohali while returning from a meeting with a central delegation, as Punjab Police also began evicting protesting farmers from Shambhu and Khanauri border points, which have been closed for more than a year.

Farmer leader Guramneet Singh Mangat said the farmer leaders were detained in Mohali while they were headed to the Shambhu protest site after the meeting with the delegation led by Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan

The meeting lasted for more than three hours, Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the talks would continue in the next meeting held on 4 May.

Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema justified the eviction of farmers from the protest sites, saying industries and businesses have has been hit hard due to the prolonged closure of two highways. The protesting farmers have been camping at the Shambhu (Shambhu-Ambala) and Khanauri (Sangrur-Jind) border Haryana since 13 February last year. —*PTI*

Farmers being detained by police in Mohali ***PHOTO: PTI***

RUSSIA, UKRAINE SWAP 175 WAR PRISONERS

KYIV, 19 MARCH

Russia and Ukraine on Wednesday each swapped 175 prisoners in one of the largest exchanges of the war.

This was after President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy spoke for about an hour on Wednesday, a day after he spoke with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. Trump said the call was to "align both Russia and Ukraine in terms of their requests and needs" as he seeks to bring about a ceasefire. During Trump's discussion with Putin on Tuesday, the Russian leader agreed not to target energy infrastructure.

But prior to his call with Trump, Zelenskyy said Wednesday that Putin's vow was "very much at odds with reality" following an overnight barrage of drone strikes across the country. Russia responded by saying it had halted its targeting of energy facilities and accused Kyiv of attacking equipment near one of its pipelines. —*PTI*

3 Kalaburagi trans women held for assaulting another

KALABURAGI, 19 MARCH

Police have arrested three transgender women who allegedly stripped, tonsured the head and assaulted another over a financial dispute recently near the Vishwaradhya Temple in Kalaburagi. The alleged crime was committed on 15 March at the Kalaburagi bus stand by six transgender women. Police identified the arrested persons as Sheela alias Vijaykumar, 38, Bhavani alias Basavaraj, 24, and Ankita alias Ankush. They said the victim, another transgender woman, was also named Ankita. The incident had sparked widespread outrage on social media. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

5 cops caught gambling in police station

KALABURAGI, 19 MARCH

District Superintendent of Police (SP) Addooru Srinivasalu has ordered the suspension of five police personnel caught gambling inside a police station. The suspended officers are Chittapur taluk's Wadi police station SSI Mahimood Miya, Head Constable Nagaraj, Saibanna, Imam and PC Nagabhushan. A video of four to five uniformed policemen playing cards on the first floor of the Wadi police station went viral on social media on Tuesday, bringing embarrassment to the police department, an official said, adding that this led to Srinivasalu issuing the suspension order. Srinivasalu has issued a notice to Wadi police station PSI Thirumalesh and sought an explanation. *—Salar News*

Jilted youth ends life in Kollegal

MYSURU, 19 MARCH

A youth, allegedly depressed by the continued rejection of marriage proposals from the girls' side, climbed on a pole of high-tension wire and electrocuted himself at TC Hundi in Kollegal taluk of Chamarajanagar district on Tuesday. Police identified the deceased as Masanashetty, 27, a resident of TC Hundi. Sources said he was unable to find a bride because of his poverty, alcoholism and various other reasons. Masanashetty climbed onto the electric pole under the influence of alcohol and screaming, triggering panic in the village. Even though the villagers tried to pacify him, he touched the live wire and died. His mother watched the scene, villagers said. . Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support. *—Salar News*

GTTC partners with NIELIT to launch tech training

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

The Government Tool & Training Centre (GTTC) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Institute of Electronics & Information Technology (NIELIT) to establish a NIELIT extension center within its campus, officials said. With this, GTTC is taking a major step forward in skill development by introducing advanced training programs in emerging technologies, they said. "This collaboration will provide students—especially those from marginalised communities in urban and rural areas—access to cutting-edge training in Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), data analytics and electronics," an official statement said. According to Minister for Skill Development and Medical Education Sharan Prakash Patil, this is a strategic initiative to strengthen skill development programs in electronics, IT-ITES, and emerging technology domains in the region. *—PTI*

BJP petitions Guv against Bill splitting BBMP

BJP dubs bill as unconstitutional, seeks Guv's intervention to protect democracy

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

A delegation of BJP leaders on Wednesday met Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot and expressed concern regarding the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, which proposes up to seven municipal corporations in the city.

Terming the proposed legislation as unconstitutional, they sought the Governor's intervention to protect the democratic structure of urban governance, preserve Bengaluru's cultural identity and ensure efficient city administration.

The Bill, passed by both Houses of the state legislature recently, proposes restructuring the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) by splitting it into a maximum of seven city corporations in the Greater Bengaluru Area.

The Bill, passed by both Houses, proposes restructuring the BBMP by splitting it into a maximum of seven city corporations PHOTO: PTI

It also provides for a constitution of a Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) for coordination and supervision, and 30-month terms for the mayor and the deputy mayor.

The GBA would be headed by the chief minister as the ex-officio chairperson, while the minister in charge of development of Bengaluru would be the ex-officio vice-chairperson.

With the passage of the bill in both Houses of the legislature, it will now come before the Governor for his assent, to become an Act.

Stating that the proposed legislation has "unconstitutional and detrimental" implications, the BJP delegation led by Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R Ashoka requested the Governor to conduct a constitutional review of the Bill and its compliance with the 74th Amendment of the Constitution. It also requested him to recommend amendments to ensure that elected representatives retain voting rights and that the governance model remains truly decentralised.

Other requests of the delegation to the Governor included preventing the creation of redundant corporations and committees, which will burden taxpayers and hinder Bengaluru's growth; ensuring that governance reforms do not undermine Kannadiga identity, traditions and linguistic representation; and also blocking financial centralisation under the Greater Bengaluru Authority to ensure fair and transparent distribution of funds for the city's development. *—PTI*

Jd(S) Mla Wants 2 Free Booze Bottles

JD(S) MLA MT Krishnappa stirred controversy, leading to a heated debate in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday when he proposed that the

Congress-led government consider providing men with two free bottles of liquor every week as part of its welfare programme.

He said, "At their cost, you're giving Rs 2,000 per month to women, free electricity, and free bus travel. That's our money anyway. So, for those who drink, give them two bottles of liquor free every week. Let them drink. How can we give men money every month? Instead, give them something—two bottles a week. What's wrong with that?" *—Salar News*

GOVT TABLES SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET WORTH RS 13,823.47 CR

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

The government on Wednesday tabled the third and the final installment of the supplementary estimates for the current fiscal, which aggregates to Rs 13,823.47 crore.

The estimates relate to additional, supplementary grants and appropriation required during the year and accounting adjustments.

The supplementary estimates aggregating to Rs 13,823.47 crore, includes Rs.71.98 crore of charged expenditure and voted expenditure of Rs.13,751.49 crore.

"Of that Rs.1512.21 crore is met out of the Reserve Funds which also needs to be voted. Net out go from consolidated fund is Rs.12,311.26 crore. A sum of Rs.1187.73 crore is covered by central assistance. Hence net cash out go is Rs.11123.53 crore," the introductory note said.

The government said this amount will be met from revenue receipts of state and if necessary through reprioritisation of expenditure and probable savings in expenditure and borrowings. *—Salar News*

HC allows peaceful 'Justice for Sowjanya' protest in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

High Court on Wednesday approved the holding of a peaceful protest related to the 'Justice for Sowjanya Movement' at Freedom Park in Bengaluru.

Justice M Nagaprasanna, while disposing of petitions from the Karnataka Karmikara Vedike (R) and Native Empowering and Equipping Team for Hope and Interaction, ruled that the protest must be peaceful.

If the protest becomes disruptive, authorities are permitted to take appropriate action. The Court emphasised that the protest should comply with the law, and any violations would allow the authorities to intervene.

Sowjanya, a 17-year-old college student from Belthangady Taluk in Dakshina Kannada, was raped and murdered in 2012. Despite several investigations, the case remains unsolved. Advocate A Velan, representing the petitioners, informed the Court that the protest had been initially approved by the Tahsildar in Belthangady Taluk but was later withdrawn following objections from an advocate. He argued that the state should not hinder the right to protest through gag orders, as long as the protest remains lawful. *—Salar News*

If the protest becomes disruptive, authorities are permitted to take appropriate action PHOTO: ANI

RSS to pass resolution on B'desh during 3-day meet

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

The All India Pratinidhi Sabha, the highest decision-making body of the RSS, will hold a three-day meeting in Bengaluru from 21 to 23 March, Sangh's Chief Spokesperson Sunil Ambekar said on Wednesday.

During the meet, the executive committee will pass resolutions on Bangladesh and the RSS centenary celebrations, he told reporters.

The presidents and general secretaries of 32 organisations affiliated to RSS will also take part in the event, including BJP national president Jagat Prakash Nadda and general secretary BL Santhosh.

He also mentioned that RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale will present a detailed synopsis of work done by the RSS and its future roadmap. The regional heads will also present their works, programmes, role and future plans, which will be reviewed. "The prevailing situation in Bangladesh, atrocities on Hindus and other minorities, the way forward and the role of RSS will be discussed in the executive committee meeting and once approved, it will be presented before the core committee."

Sunil Ambekar PHOTO: ANI

"So we are very much keen that anywhere, either in Bangladesh or anywhere in the world, Hindus, security, Hindus, their pride, their sensitivity should be respected. So that's the main point. So we will discuss how to express it and what should be the further plan," he added.

Regarding the centenary year celebration of RSS, he said, on Vijayadashami this year, the Sangh will complete its 100 years. He also said lakhs of youngsters are joining the RSS. *—PTI*

NO SIGN OF FIR AS CONG DALIT WORKER SAYS CM'S AIDE BROKE HER FINGER

BENGALURU, 19 MARCH

A Dalit Congress leader who accused Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's aide HM Revanna of assaulting her claims the police are yet to file an FIR.

Nandini Nagraj alleged that when she was having lunch on 17 March at City's Kumara Krupa Guest House, Revanna, who is Chairman of Karnataka State Guarantee Schemes Implementation Committee, barged in with 12 other men and confronted her about a complaint she had filed with the party high command in January.

Nagraj told Salar News Revanna also used casteist slurs against her for denying to halt a tender process.

She had earlier escalated this matter to Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge.

The assault left Nagraj with a fractured finger. "When I took out my phone to record the incident, Revanna pushed me and even tried to grab me by the neck," she said.

Nagraj alleged that Revanna ordered his driver and assistant to attack her, and they tried to pull her down by her leg.

This took place in front of senior Congress leaders – former MP VS Ugrappa, MLC Mahesh Kumar and Kapu MP Vinay Kumar Sorake.

High Grounds police official told Salar News, "We have the video evidence submitted by her but are yet to take cognisance and begin probe. Hence, an FIR has not been filed."

They registered a Non-Cognisable Report.

"They told me that there is a 14-day waiting period," Nagraj said, adding that she will send a complaint to the CM and the Governor.

Karnataka Women's Commission Chairperson Dr Nagalakshmi Chowdhary said, "We will write to the DCP seeking immediate action."

Revanna refused to comment. *—Salar News*

AGANWADI WORKERS PROTEST

Members of the Karnataka State Anganwadi Workers and Helpers Association protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Wednesday, demanding that gratuity be provided to workers and helpers who retired 2011 onwards PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Special court hears MUDA case petitioner

MYSURU, 19 MARCH

Activist Snehamayi Krishna, the MUDA case petitioner who raised objections against the findings of Lokayukta police in their investigation into the site allotment scam involving Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and family, on Wednesday argued his case before a special court.

The next hearing is scheduled for 24 March.

Speaking to reporters later in the day, he said he informed the High Court about irregularities in the MUDA scam over allotment of sites under the controversial 50:50 scheme.

In its investigation report submitted by Lokayukta to the High Court, officials have also highlighted irregularities in MUDA in the site allotment scheme. But they have given a clean chit to the CM, his wife Parvathi and other accused, saying that they have no role in receiving the sites from MUDA.

Lokayukta has put the blame of irregularities on MUDA officials, he said.

However, Krishna said that he argued in the court accusing Lokayukta of acting under the influence of the CM and submitting the report to the High Court.

After hearing his argument, the High Court has issued a notice to Lokayukta to appear before the court on next hearing and submit their explanation.

Krishna said he stood firm on his complaint and will continue until case reaches its logical end. *—Salar News*

FILM SHOOT GONE WRONG

Mock murder video causes panic, lands duo in Kalaburagi jail

KALABURAGI, 19 MARCH

In a shocking incident, two individuals were arrested by the Kalaburagi Suburban Police for causing public nuisance after they choreographed and filmed a gruesome murder video for a short film and circulated it on social media creating widespread panic among the public. The police took suo-motu cognizance of the matter and apprehended the suspects on Tuesday.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Saibanna Belagumpi (27), an auto driver from Siddeshwar Colony, and Sachin Sinde (26), a resident of KK Nagar. According to the police, the duo were working on a short film titled 'mental majunu'

The duo covered themselves in fake blood & sat half-naked on the road

Without informing the concerned authorities or locals, they shot a scene late Monday night on Humnabad Ring Road in Kalaburagi. During the shoot, Sachin and Saibanna covered themselves in red-colored liquid resembling blood, sat half-naked on the road, and enacted a brutal murder scene. One of them held an iron hammer and pretended to kill the other while screaming loudly. The disturbing video spread rapidly across social media overnight, alarming the public. As soon as it went viral, the Suburban Police swung into action, tracked down the duo, registered a case under Section 292 and cognisable offences of causing continued public nuisance under Section 293 of Baratiya Nyay Sanhita and arrested them. The suspects have now been remanded to judicial custody. *—Salar News*

The bus which was going from Bidar to Aurad PHOTO: SALAR

STATE BUS CATCHES FIRE DUE TO HEAT IN BIDAR, NO CASUALTIES

BIDAR, 19 MARCH

Soaring heat may have resulted in a bus catching fire here in Bidar. KKRTC transport bus carrying passengers suddenly caught fire near Kappikere village in Aurad taluk fortunately no loss of life was reported. The bus which was going from Bidar to Aurad got completely destroyed in the fire. Sources said the fire started in the engine, the driver stopped the bus and evacuated all the passengers immediately preventing fatalities. The Aurad fire brigade and personnel rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire. With temperatures in Bidar district ranging between 30 to 40 degrees Celsius, it is suspected that the extreme heat might have caused the fire. *—Salar News*

1 DEAD AS FAMILY OF 4 ATTEMPTS SUICIDE IN HAMPI

HOSAPETE, 19 MARCH

A family of four from Kotturu, Ballari, attempted suicide by consuming pesticide at the Saraswati temple in Kamalapur, near the popular tourist site of Hampi. Tragically, 43-year-old Chandraiah, the father, died.

The incident occurred at 9.30pm after the family had visited various locations in Hampi. Chandraiah, his wife, and their two children ingested the pesticide. All four were immediately transported to a government hospital. His wife and children, who also consumed the poison, are receiving treatment and are now out of danger. *—Salar New*

Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.

Nagpur riots key accused arrested

54 arrested; 2,000 armed police have been deployed in the sensitive areas as curfew continues

NAGPUR/CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR 19 MARCH

Police have arrested at least 54 people, including Minority Democratic Party leader Fahim Khan in connection with the Nagpur violence, officials said.

Khan's name is mentioned in one of six FIRs registered so far as one of the key accused in connection with the violent clashes that left several police personnel injured. Police are investigating whether Khan played any role in instigating riots.

"54 people have been arrested in connection with Nagpur violence. They dared to attack policemen. We will show what is meant by police fear. They will not be spared," Maharashtra minister Yogesh Kadam said, adding that the mastermind behind the attacks is yet to be identified.

Meanwhile, police said that the law and order is under control but curfew continues in many sensitive areas of the city.

During the curfew, the deputy commissioner of police (DCP) of the respective areas would take calls about vehicular movements on the streets. More than 2,000 armed police personnel have been deployed in the sensitive areas.

The administration further declared the grave of the Mughal ruler a "no drone" zone.

Police are also tracking "objectionable" social media posts and getting them deleted, another official said. Over 506 such online posts have been deleted so far and over 80 individuals were warned to desist from posting incendiary content. Police are monitoring hashtags around Alamgir and Aurangzeb.

Thirty-three police personnel, including three DCP-rank officers, were injured on Monday night when mobs went on a rampage, damaging vehicles, hurling petrol bombs and stones at police, and attacking houses.

The violence was triggered after the right-wing VHP protested for the demolotion of Aurangzeb's tomb. —*PTI*

A closed road amid curfew after clashes following the VHP-Bajrang Dal protests demanding removal of Aurangzeb's tomb in Nagpur ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rioters sexually molested woman constable

NAGPUR, 19 MARCH

A group of rioters allegedly touched a woman constable inappropriately and tried to disrobe her during the violence in Nagpur city, officials said on Wednesday.

"Taking advantage of the darkness, the group tried to touch a woman constable of the Riot Control Police (RCP) and her uniform and tried to disrobe her. They used abusive language and passed vulgar remarks against other women police personnel. The rioters also made objectionable gestures and attacked them," an official said. —*PTI*

Student out to buy milk now fighting for life

NAGPUR, 19 MARCH

Relatives of individuals from violence-hit areas in Nagpur are struggling to understand how their family members ended up in hospitals and are now battling for their lives.

Irfan Ansari, a welder by profession, left home around 11pm on Monday, intending to board a train to Itarsi from the Nagpur railway station, an area that was heavily affected by violence, triggered by VHP's protest for the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb, situated in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.

The family received a call from the Indira Gandhi Government Medical College & Hospital (IGGMCH), informing them that Irfan had been admitted following an accident.

Irfan suffered severe head wounds, and a fractured leg, and is currently in the ICU, receiving oxygen. Despite the severity of the situation, the family is yet to file a police complaint as they remain focused on Irfan's treatment and are unaware of what transpired during his journey to the station.

In a similar case, 17-year-old Raza Younas Khan, a 12th-grade commerce student, is fighting for his life at a private hospital. Khan, was sent by his mother around 10:30pm to buy milk and curd.

She later received a call at around 11:30pm from IGGMCH, informing her that her son had been admitted to the hospital in critical condition.

Khan was subsequently transferred to a private hospital, where he remains on a ventilator. His family is also unaware of the violent situation in their locality and is at a loss as to how their son sustained such serious injuries. —*PTI*

Ordnance factory worker arrested for leaking info to Pak

KANPUR, 19 MARCH

The Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorism Squad on Wednesday arrested an employee of the Kanpur Ordnance Factory for allegedly sharing classified and sensitive information with a Pakistani intelligence operative through social media, statement said. According ATS's statement, the accused, Kumar Vikas, was employed as a Junior Works Manager at the Kanpur Ordnance Factory and was in contact with a suspected Pakistani agent since January 2025 who used the alias "Neha Sharma". On 13 March, ATS arrested another Ordnance Factory employee, Ravindra Kumar, from Hazratpur, Firozabad, for similar offenses. —*PTI*

Bihar: Lalu appears before ED over land-for-jobs scam

PATNA, 19 MARCH

RJD president Lalu Prasad on Wednesday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which had summoned him in connection with its probe into land-for-jobs scam, officials said. The ailing septuagenarian reached the ED's Bank Road office in Patna around 10.30am and left the premises after being grilled for nearly four hours. On Tuesday, Prasad's wife Rabri Devi and elder son Tej Pratap Yadav, both named as co-accused, had been quizzed by the agency for close to four hours. Meanwhile, Prasad's younger son Tejashwi Yadav, who is also named as an accused, told reporters, "The more we are harassed, the stronger we shall become. Of course, the case is politically motivated. Had I not been in politics, I would not have been dragged into this."—*PTI*

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Pramod Sawant achieves landmark of 6 yrs as Goa CM

PANAJI, 19 MARCH

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has achieved a historic milestone, completing six consecutive years in office. This feat surpasses the records of his predecessors, Manohar Parrikar and Digambar Kamat. Sawant, 51, represents the Sankhalim assembly constituency in North Goa and is currently serving his second term as Chief Minister. He first took oath in March 2019, following Parrikar's passing, and was re-elected in March 2022. Although Sawant has achieved this milestone, Parrikar remains the longest-serving CM of Goa, with a total tenure of nearly nine years. Sawant has presented five state budgets and is set to table his sixth budget on 26 March. If Sawant completes his current five-year tenure, he will become the second CM to do so after Kamat, who served from 2007 to 2012. Sawant's achievement is a significant milestone in Goa's political history. —*PTI*

Jamia revokes suspension of 10 students

NEW DELHI, 18 MARCH

Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) has revoked the suspension of at least 10 students who were penalised for allegedly participating in protests on campus. However, the students have been asked to sign a "bond of good conduct" within seven working days of receiving the revocation letter. This move follows a Delhi High Court order staying the university's suspension action. Last month, JMI had suspended 17 students for participating in protests against disciplinary action taken against two PhD scholars who allegedly organized "Jamia Resistance Day" on 15 December, 2024. The JMI administration has not made any official comments regarding the matter or the revocation of the suspension of the remaining seven students.—*PTI*

T'gana's ₹3L cr budget gives SOPs to SC/ST

HYDERABAD, 19 MARCH

The Congress government in Telangana on Wednesday presented a budget of nearly Rs 3.05 lakh crore for 2025-26, with over Rs 56,000 crore for the implementation of the party's 'six poll guarantees', while expecting to raise Rs 64,000 crore through open market loans.

The government focused on welfare and development, allocating a sizeable portion to oppressed groups. The government allocated rupees 40,232 crore for Scheduled Castes, Rs 17,169 crore for Scheduled tribes and Rs 11,405 crore Backward Classes Welfare.

The budget estimates revenue expenditure of Rs 2.27 lakh crore and capital expenditure of Rs 36,504 crore, said Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, who tabled the financial document in the state Assembly.

The state government has proposed an allocation of Rs 24,439 crore for the Agriculture Department, including towards the Rythu Bharosa Scheme, under which each farmer receives Rs 12,000 per acre annually as investment support and an additional incentive of Rs 500 per quintal for paddy procured from farmers.

The state's outstanding liabilities stood at over Rs 4.51 lakh crore. To address the issue of off-budget borrowings, the state is actively negotiating with financial institutions to lower borrowing costs and extend the repayment periods. – *PTI*

Ex-AAP minister Satyendar Jain booked in CCTV case

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Delhi government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) has registered a case against former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a Rs 571-crore CCTV project, an official said on Wednesday.

According to the ACB, Jain allegedly accepted a bribe of Rs 7 crore to waive the liquidated damages penalty of Rs 16 crore imposed on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

The project, which was executed when he was a PWD minister in the previous Arvind Kejriwal government, was related to the installation of 1.4 lakh CCTV cameras across all 70 assembly constituencies.

Multiple complaints have suggested that the project was executed in a shoddy manner, with several cameras found to be non-functional at the time of hand over, Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Madhur Verma said.

Satyendar Jain ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Although there was no immediate response from Jain, his Aam Aadmi Party called it a case of "political witch-hunt".

"When investigating agencies leave their work and start political witch-hunting on the orders of the boss."

She also shared a document highlighting a reply by the BJP-led Centre in Parliament, which claimed that out of the 193 cases filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against political leaders in the past 10 years, only two resulted in convictions. —*PTI*

DMK protests outside Parliament

DMK MPs protests over the issue of delimitation of parliamentary constituencies during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) staged a protest against delimitation in the Parliament House premises on Wednesday. Several INDIA bloc MPs also joined the protest.

In the protest, DMK MPs Kanimozhi, T Siva, and Dayanidhi Maran, along with party MPs, were present while holding a banner written "fair delimitation."

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin called for a united political front against the proposed delimitation exercise, urging various parties to join forces in opposing what he termed a "blatant assault on federalism."

On 8 March, Chief Minister Stalin wrote to the Chief Ministers of seven states, both from National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ruling states and otherwise, to join him in the "fight against this unfair exercise."

He has written to Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan, Telangana CM Revanth Reddy, Andhra Pradesh CM N Chandrababu Naidu, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi, and heads of all political parties in those respective states to join him.

Congress has backed CM Stalin's stance. However, the party has not yet confirmed whether they will join the Joint Action Committee meeting on 22 March.

Congress leader P Chidambaram also expressed his fear that if delimitation is conducted, Southern states will lose seats in the Lok Sabha, .

"Delimitation is a serious issue. It was frozen in 1971. A census taken after 2026 will lead to delimitation, followed by re-determination of the seats. The five southern states will lose 26 seats, whereas the populous states where population is growing will gain seats, especially UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan," Chidambaram said. —*ANI*

INCLUDE HEATWAVES IN GOVT PLANS

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

A parliamentary panel has suggested that the Centre include "new and emerging" disasters, such as heatwaves, in its disaster management plans. The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs recommended setting up a system to regularly review and update the official list of disasters. It recommended greater investment in disaster-resistant infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and transport systems, to reduce damage and speed up recovery, and called for a dedicated heat budget. —*PTI*

NO CHANGE IN GOVT RETIREMENT AGE

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The government is not considering any proposal to change the retirement age of its employees, Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said. He also said the government has no policy to abolish vacancy created by retirement of employees. "No proposal to change the retirement age of government employees is under consideration of the government," Singh said. —*PTI*

7,971 TRAIN STONING CASES SINCE 2023

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Wednesday said that 7,971 incidents of stone pelting on trains, including Vande Bharat, have been reported from 2023 till February 2025, with 4,549 people arrested in these cases. "The train escorting parties have been sensitised to remain more vigilant in the vulnerable sections/spots, where incidents of vandalising on trains are frequently reported," Vaishnaw said. —*PTI*

> **Earlier, terrorists were glorified and they were served good food. Today they will either go to jail or to 'jahannum' (hell).**
>
> - Nityanand Rai, Minister of State for Home.

> **1,000 Hindus are missing from the Kumbh. People put up posters of missing people and the government is even getting those removed.**
>
> -Akhilesh Yadav, Samajwadi Party chief

> **Ruling party leaders emerged victorious only because of Narendra Modi's name. Unless you are Modi, nobody can match the popularity of actors.**
>
> - Jaya Bachchan, Samajwadi Party MP

DRAWS BJP'S PRAISE

Tharoor wiping 'egg on his face' for flaying govt on war

NEW DELHI/T'PURAM, 19 MARCH

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor Tuesday said he was left with an egg on his face in opposing India's stance when the Russia-Ukraine war broke out. He said due to the policy that was adopted, the country is now in a position where it can make a difference for lasting peace.

While Tharoor justified his changed stand on the issue saying he made his opinion as a "Bharatheeyan" and doesn't see politics in that, the BJP saw his praise as an endorsement of India's deft diplomacy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

The Congress leader on Tuesday conceded that he was left with an "egg on his face" in opposing India's stance when the Russia-Ukraine war broke out .

Shashi Tharoor ***PHOTO: PTI***

- BJP state president K Surendran said Shashi Tharoor had a truly "refreshing take" and admired his "honesty" in praising Modi's diplomacy

Tharoor had earlier criticised India's stance when Russia attacked Ukraine and called for condemnation of the aggression.

Meanwhile, the BJP leadership in Kerala hailed Tharoor for his changed stance and said his "honesty" in praising Modi's diplomacy is "commendable".

BJP state president K Surendran said Tharoor had "truly a refreshing take".

Tharoor said on Tuesday that the policy adopted by India following the outbreak of the conflict meant that the country has actually a Prime Minister who can hug both the president of Ukraine and the president in Moscow two weeks apart and be accepted in both places. —*PTI*

Cong MP Rakesh Rathor gets bail in rape case

SITAPUR, 19 MARCH

Congress MP Rakesh Rathor walked out of Sitapur jail on Wednesday morning, a day after a local court granted him bail in a rape case. As he stepped out of prison, the lawmaker maintained his innocence.

The Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court granted Rathor bail on 11 March in the case filed under Section 64 (rape) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). However, on the same day, Sitapur police filed a chargesheet against him, adding Section 69 (sexual intercourse by deceit) of the BNS. This prevented his immediate release and forced him to apply for bail again.

Police and prosecution said, Rathor allegedly raped a 45-year-old woman on the pretext of marriage and promise of furthering her political career. Rathor dismissed claims about lack of support from the Congress saying that Rahul Gandhi was in constant touch with his family. —*PTI*

India concerned over dire situation in Gaza

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

India said it is concerned over the situation in Gaza and called for supply of humanitarian assistance to the affected people as Israel resumed bombing in conflict-hit Palestinian territory shattering its fragile ceasefire with Hamas.

"We are concerned at the situation in Gaza. It is important that all hostages are released," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"We also call for the supply of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza to be sustained," it said in a statement.

India's comments came as Israel bombed Hamas targets in Gaza on Tuesday, triggering uncertainty over the ceasefire that came into effect on 19 January. According to the Hamas-run health ministry, over 400 people were killed in the Israeli attack.

India has been a staunch support for the two-State solution to the Palestinian conflict, reiterating its belief that Israelis and Palestinians could one day live side by side in peace and security.

The Israeli action came after Israel and Hamas failed to agree on how to take forward the ceasefire deal from the initial phase. The deal comprised three stages.

The negotiations on the second phase of the ceasefire pact were to start around six weeks back. But the two sides could not hold the talks.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said his country will not "relent" until it achieves all "vital goals".

"In the past two weeks, Israel did not initiate any military action in the hope that Hamas would change course. Well, that didn't happen," he said in a statement on Tuesday.

"While Israel accepted the offer of President Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, Hamas flatly refused to do so," he said. "This is why I authorised yesterday the renewal of military action against Hamas," —*PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

HC bins cooling period in Chahal's divorce plea

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday waived the mandatory six-month cooling off period post filing of divorce plea by cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal and his estranged wife Dhanashree Verma, and directed the family court to decide on their divorce plea by Thursday. A single bench of Justice Madhav Jamdar said Chahal would not be available from 21 March as he has to participate in the upcoming IPL cricket tournament. The duo had filed a divorce plea in a family court in Mumbai on 5 February this year. They had submitted a petition mutually seeking for the cooling off period to be waived as their divorce was by mutual consent, but the family court on 20 February refused to waive the same. *—PTI*

₹80L heist: Delhi cops use Israeli face detection tech

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

An Israeli facial recognition system has helped Delhi Police nab two robbers and recover their loot in Delhi's famous Chandini Chowk area. The arrested accused, identified as Md Ali 21and Samir 19 allegedly robbed a trader's employee at gunpoint and escaped with Rs 80 lakh, firing a warning shot before fleeing according to the police. Police analysed footage from nearly 500 CCTV cameras installed in Chandni Chowk, Red Fort, Jama Masjid, Daryaganj and Lahori Gate areas and used an Israeli facial recognition technology to identify suspects. Police traced Ali who spilled the beans on his accomplice Samir. Police found Rs 79.5 lakh in cash, a semi-automatic pistol, other incriminating materials at Sameer's house. *—PTI*

4 dead as company vehicle catches fire in Pune

PUNE, 19 MARCH

Four employees of a private firm were charred to death and five others injured after their company vehicle caught fire near Pune on Wednesday morning. An official said the casualties were because the emergency exit at the rear side of the minibus could not be opened. At Hinjewadi in Pimpri Chinchwad area, a vehicle ferrying 12 employees of Vyoma Graphics was moving near Dassault Systemes, a fire started close to the driver's feet. As the fire spread, four employees immediately disembarked, escaping with burns. "Those at the rear side of the vehicle tried to escape through the emergency exit at the backside. "Preliminary probe suggests that some employees failed to evict themselves after the exit door did not open," an official said. *—PTI*

MP mob attack: SP, collector transferred after ASI's death

BHOPAL, 19 MARCH

Days after a mob attack claimed the life of a police assistant sub-inspector (ASI) in Madhya Pradesh's Mauganj district, the government has transferred its collector and the superintendent of police. SP Rasna Thakur has been transferred to Bhopal and appointed as assistant inspector general at a police headquarters there. The SP of the Economic Offences Wing, Dilip Kumar Soni, will take her position. Collector Ajay Shrivastava is transferred elsewhere and will be replaced by Deputy Secretary Sanjay Kumar Jain. The violence in Gadra village unfolded when members of the Kol tribe abducted and killed Sunny Dwivedi, accusing him of being responsible for the death of a tribal man. When police rushed to the scene, the mob then began attacking them, resulting in the death of ASI Ramcharan Gautam. *—PTI*

Seniors can cancel deeds if kids don't care for them: HC

Court says 'love and affection is implied in deeds'

CHENNAI, 19 MARCH

Senior citizens can cancel the gift or settlement deeds executed in favour of their children or close relatives if they fail to take care of them, the Madras High Court ruled. They may do so even if it was not explicitly mentioned in the deed's conditions.

A division bench comprising Justices SM Subramaniam and K Rajasekar dismissed an appeal filed by S Mala, daughter-in-law of deceased S Nagalakshmi, recently.

Originally, Nagalakshmi executed a settlement deed in favour of her son Kesavan with hope that he and her daughter-in-law will take care of her till her lifetime. But he failed to take care of her. Her daughter-in-law also neglected her after her son died, prompting her to cancel the deed at the RDO, Nagapattinam.

Mala filed an appeal challenging the cancellation.

The bench said section 23(1) of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 was designed to protect senior citizens in situations, where they transfer their property, either through a gift or settlement, often motivated by love and affection, with the expectation that the transferee will provide for their basic amenities.

The court was hearing a case where a senior citizen had canceled a gift deed, saying her son and his wife neglected her PHOTO: AI

- Senior citizens often transfer their property, either through a gift or settlement, with the expectation that the transferee will provide for their basic amenities, the court said

If the transferee fails to meet these obligations, the senior citizen has the option to seek a declaration rendering the transfer void.

The bench said the legal position, in the context of the principles laid down by the Supreme Court of India and High Courts, makes it clear that the conditions need not be explicit, but might be implied. The love and affection, which can be traced out in the Settlement Deed, was an implied condition that the senior citizen will be taken care of by the beneficiary, the bench added.

The bench said in the present case, Nagalakshmi, both in her complaint and before the RDO, categorically deposed that she was completely neglected by Kesavan during his lifetime and by Mala. *—PTI*

Security personnel deployed after clashes in Churachandpur PHOTO: ANI

Several injured as clashes erupt in Manipur

IMPHAL, 19 MARCH

Several people were injured as fresh clashes broke out between people belonging to Zomi and Hmar tribes in Manipur's Churachandpur district on Wednesday. The clashes took place in Churachandpur town late on Tuesday, just hours after a peace settlement was reached between the apex bodies of the two communities.

The fresh clashes erupted after a group of men tried to take down a flag of a Zomi militant outfit in the town. Soon, mobs of men armed with batons engaged in stone pelting, prompting security personnel to fire tear gas shells and several rounds in the air to disperse the crowds, an official said.

Security forces had a trying time in controlling the mobs that vandalised several properties even as shots were also fired by some people in the crowds at their rivals, the official said.

"It is not yet clear who fired the shots," he added.

In response to the development, the Zomi Students' Federation imposed a shutdown in the district with immediate effect. In a statement, the students' body said, "The emergency shutdown has become necessary in wake of the volatile situation in Churachandpur. All normal activities shall remain suspended."

The clashes between Zomi and Hmar tribes started after Hmar Inpui general secretary Richard Hmar was attacked by some Zomi people on Sunday after a driving related altercation which led to violence and the imposition of curfew in the district the next day. While a settlement was reached between Hmar and the attackers on Tuesday, tensions still continue in the district. *—PTI*

Gaganyaan astronauts avoiding distractions

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The four astronauts selected for Gaganyaan, India's first human space flight mission, have been kept out of the public glare to ensure that there were no distractions, as they were undergoing certain acclimatisation and training programmes, the government said on Wednesday.

Group Captain Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair, Angad Prathap, Ajit Krishnan and Shubanshu Shukla have been selected for the mission.

Union Minister of State for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh, told the Lok Sabha during Question Hour, "It was a view that giving too much exposure to the media and the public might cause a distraction which may not be in the compatible interest of all."

Singh was responding to a question on why these astronauts were kept away from public eyes.

The minister also said that one of the astronauts, Shukla, would accompany astronauts from other countries on their journey to the International Space Station (ISS).

"The chosen one was Wing Commander Shukla, now Group Captain Shukla." *—PTI*

Corbett illegal construction: SC raps U'khand 'snail's pace' probe

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Supreme Court pulled up the Uttarakhand government for moving at a "snail's pace" against its senior officers accused of illegal constructions in Corbett Tiger Reserve.

While ordering for the departmental proceedings to be concluded within three months, a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih deprecated the state's practice of moving speedily against junior level officers but not against the senior officers.

It noted an affidavit of the state elaborated on the departmental proceedings initiated against the officers.

Referring to a chart placed before it, the court said the departmental proceedings were completed against 16 of the 17 officers who were in the rank of ranger, deputy ranger, etc. However, one of the officials died in a road accident.

The bench said another chart indicated the proceedings moving at a snail's pace against senior officers.

"We, therefore, direct the state government to conclude all the departmental proceedings in respect of all the officers within a period of three months from today," the bench said and posted the hearing three months later.

The National Environment Policy of 2006 defines an ESZ as areas or zones with identified environmental resources having incomparable values that require special attention for their conservation because of their landscape, wildlife, biodiversity, historical and natural values.

The court was dealing with the issue of eco-sensitive zone notification for the Rajaji National Park and Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand.

The matter was posted after 12 weeks.

In March, the court came down heavily on illegal construction activities and felling of trees in the reserve. *—PTI*

SC fixes 16 April for hearing pleas against CEC, ECs

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday fixed 16 April for hearing a batch of pleas challenging the appointment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners (EC) under the 2023 law.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan requested an urgent hearing of the matter, saying it goes to the root of democracy and the issue is covered by the 2023 Constitution bench verdict.

Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, said the matter involved a short legal question -- whether the verdict should be followed for the appointment of the CEC and ECs through a panel involving the prime minister, Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or the 2023 law, excluding the CJI.

"We will fix it on 16 April, so that it is finally heard," the bench of justices said. *—PTI*

6 including juvie arrested for minor's rape in T'gana

HYDERABAD, 18 MARCH

Five members of a gang, including a woman, were arrested on Tuesday for allegedly kidnapping a minor girl, raping her and "attempting" to force her into prostitution in Warangal district of Telangana, police said. A juvenile has also been apprehended in connection with the case, they said.

On 11 March, the minor girl went missing in the limits of Mills Colony police station, following which a case was registered. Upon search, the girl was traced and rescued near Mulugu, when she told police that she was kidnapped by a group of people who forced her to consume marijuana (ganja) and then she was sexually assaulted, the statement said.

Warangal Commissioner of Police, Sunpreet Singh, formed three special investigation teams to apprehend the accused persons.

Investigations further revealed that the woman, the prime accused in the case, lured girls through social media and conspired to bring women or girls into prostitution, to earn more money from clients, police said. *—PTI*

ED finds Rs 91 lakh kickbacks by HCA

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate Wednesday claimed that the office bearers of the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) gave contracts at "highly inflated" prices for supply of cricket balls, bucket chairs, and gym equipment installed at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

The federal probe agency in a statement said that on Tuesday it issued a provisional order for attachment of immovable properties worth Rupees 51.29 lakh as part of its investigation under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The agency alleged that "proceeds of crime totalling rupees 90.86 lakh were received by Surender Agarwal and his family members.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

- Only Surender Agarwal, ex vice president and treasurer of the HCA was named in the probe, saying that the illicit financial gains were transfered to his family members

The probe revealed that HCA office bearers gave contracts for supply of cricket balls, bucket chairs and gym equipment to companies Sara Sports, Excellent Enterprises, and Body Drench India Pvt Ltd, respectively, at highly inflated prices.

The merchandise was meant for the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium.

The agency only named Surender Agarwal, the ex-Vice President and Treasurer of HCA, in the statement, saying the "illicit" financial gains were transferred to him and his family members.

Agarwal or his family members could not be contacted immediately for a response.

It claimed that Sara Sports transferred Rupees 17 lakh to KB Jewellers, a proprietorship firm of Agarwal's wife, as well to a personal bank account of his son Akshit Agarwal by "layering" the funds through accounts of several entities on the pretext of sponsoring a music show.

The case stems from three FIRs and charge sheets filed by the Telangana Anti-Corruption Bureau in connection with alleged misappropriation of Rs 20 crore at the HCA. —PTI

SUNITA IS BACK

School students and teachers hold placards as they celebrate with firecrackers the safe landing of astronaut Sunita Williams, at a school in Ahmedabad, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

UP HORROR

Man killed by wife, lover; sealed in cement

Rajput's body was found sealed inside a cement drum PHOTO: X

Deceased Merchant Navy officer Saurabh Rajput; wife Muskan Rastogi; lover Sahil

MEERUT, 19 MARCH

A merchant navy officer was allegedly stabbed to death by his wife and her lover, his body dismembered and sealed inside a drum with cement, police said. His remains have been recovered and the two accused arrested. The incident took place in the Indira Nagar area here, police said on Tuesday.

The victim, Saurabh Rajput 29 from Brahmpuri's Indra Nagar Phase 2, went missing on 4 March and after investigation on the basis of suspicion, police detained Rajput's wife Muskan 27 and her lover Sahil 25. During interrogation, the two confessed to the gruesome crime, he added.

The remains have been sent for post-mortem and a case has been registered based on a complaint lodged by Rajput's family, police said. According to Rajput's family, Muskan attempted to mislead them by sending messages from his phone. After committing the crime, Muskan and Sahil went on a vacation to a hill station, the ASP said.

Police said Rajput and Muskan, from Gauripura, had a love marriage in 2016. Their families were unhappy with their relationship and the couple lived separately in a rented house in Indira Nagar Phase 1 with their three-year-old daughter, police said. *—PTI*

Cities at risk of heat focus on short-term fixes

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Some of India's cities most vulnerable to future heat waves focus mainly on immediate responses while long-term measures remain rare, a study by the Sustainable Futures Collaborative, a New Delhi-based research organisation said.

The analysis examines how nine major Indian cities -- Bengaluru, Delhi, Faridabad, Gwalior, Kota, Ludhiana, Meerut, Mumbai and Surat -- are preparing for the increasing threat of extreme heat.

These cities together account for over 11 per cent of India's urban population.

The report said that while all nine cities focus on short-term responses to heat waves, "long-term actions remain rare and where they do exist, they are poorly targeted".

Without effective long-term strategies, India is likely to witness more heat-related deaths due to more frequent, intense and prolonged heat waves in the coming years, the authors said.

"Many of the long-tMost cities studied have adopted short-term measures such as ensuring drinking water access, adjusting work schedules and increasing hospital capacity before or during heat waves, the report said. *—PTI*

KASAVU SAREE ON EVEREST

Vasanthi Cheruveettil, a 59-year-old tailor from Kannur, Kerala fulfilled her dream to trek Mt Everest. She taught herself basic trekking techniques by following YouTube videos. Every day she would walk for three hours to get accustomed to her trekking boots. Her determination made her friends join her daily walks. Her trek ended at the Everest Base Camp where she doned a traditional Kerala Kasavu saree while waving the Indian flag

PHOTO: PTI

Who is responsible when space missions go wrong?

Now back on Earth thanks to Space X's Dragon capsule, astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore will be breathing fresh air again after a gruelling nine months onboard the International Space Station.

Stranded in June 2024 after their experimental Boeing Starliner spacecraft malfunctioned and was deemed too risky to carry passengers back to Earth, their stay was further extended last week when the recovery mission was postponed due to launchpad problems.

A successful rescue mission will be a relief to NASA, which had the unprecedented task of figuring out how to get the astronauts home. But the crisis has also raised difficult questions about space missions and what happens if they don't go to plan.

This is complicated by civilians now going into space, including actor William Shatner and business tycoons Jeff Bezos and Richard Branson.

Later this year, pop star Katy Perry and talk show host Gayle King will blast off on board Blue Origin's NS-31 Mission.

Corporations such as SpaceX, Blue Origin, Rocket Lab and Virgin Galactic are increasingly at the forefront of the new space race, but they operate in a legal vacuum as well as an atmospheric one.

With the law not keeping pace with this rapid rise in commercial space exploration and exploitation, just who has a duty to rescue so-called space tourists and astronauts is unclear. Urgent legal reform is needed.

International space law contains a special duty for countries to rescue astronauts, regardless of their nationality.

According to the United Nations Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, all member countries of the treaty, not just the country that launched the mission, have a duty to take "all necessary steps" to assist spacecraft crew in distress.

Astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore will be breathing fresh air again after a gruelling nine months onboard the International Space Station ***PHOTO: PTI***

This includes missions still in space as well as spacecraft that crash land in another state's territory or at sea.

The state conducting the rescue mission must safely return the astronauts to Earth – and to the country they originally launched from.

But it's not clear whether private space companies will have a similar duty. Some experts worry space tourists may have no real legal protection.

Space law dates from the 20th century, when the 1967 Outer Space Treaty was adopted. But the original space race ivolved superpowers, and the possibility of corporations one day crossing the "final frontier" wasn't even considered.

So, if space tourists become stranded like Williams and Wilmore have been, there's a possibility – in law at least – they could be left to fend for themselves.

Who is an 'astronaut'? Space policy experts are now calling on the international community to adopt a broad interpretation of the term "astronaut" to ensure anyone has a right to be rescued regardless of their legal status.

They're also calling for new rules to determine who is responsible for rescuing private citizens if they get into trouble. Despite the several treaties and conventions regulating space activity, none address space tourism.

Currently, space tourism involves lower atmosphere travel, but SpaceX's Elon Musk has talked about sending tourists to Mars. However realistic that is, space law is struggling to keep up with such ambitions.

With the rise of private space missions, there is now a strong argument for the companies involved being required to shoulder or share the associated costs and responsibilities.

Described by the UN Office of Outer Space Affairs as "envoys of humankind", astronauts undergo years of arduous training before taking part in space missions. They are acutely aware of the risks of space travel – but have embraced it.

The same can't be said for civilians. Space tourism is still in its early days, but the companies promoting it will need to act responsibly and sustainably.

This means making their customers aware of the dangers and implementing rescue procedures and protocols.

Without proper regulatory oversight, however, space tourism companies could require prospective customers to sign legal agreements waiving their right to rescue if they are in danger.

The challenge for space law now is to find a workable compromise between human safety and corporate profit motives. *—The Conversation*

SALAR ساہر

For 50 yrs, a Hindu family calls for Sehri in UP

For Muslims around the world, the holy month of Ramzan is a time for devotion and discipline.

But in Kauriya, a small village in Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh district, Ramzan also symbolises deep, inter-faith camaraderie.

For the past 50 years, the Hindu family of Gulab Yadav has been ensuring that Muslims in the village wake up on time for 'Sehri', the pre-dawn meal consumed before fasting during Ramzan.

For 45-year-old Yadav and his 12-year-old son Abhishek, sleep is a luxury they forgo during Ramzan.

Every night at 1.00am, the father-son duo sets out on foot, armed with a torch and a stick to ward off stray dogs, walks through the village, stops at every Muslim household, and don't leave until they are certain that the families are awake for Sehri.

There is an old saying: "Foster such friendship that religion never becomes a barrier -- If you walk them to a temple, they should walk you to a mosque."

Yadav embodies this sentiment, carrying forward a tradition started by his father Chirkit Yadav way back in 1975.

While most mosques gave wake-up calls to the "rozedaars" -- people observing fast during Ramzan -- using loudspeakers, a recent Supreme Court directive on noise pollution has led to stricter curbs on them at religious sites.

As a result, Yadav's dedicated effort has become even more significant.

Recalling his early years, Yadav said as a child he never fully understood why his father went out at night, waking people up for Sehri.

But as he grew older, he came to appreciate the deeper meaning behind the tradition. "Now I find great peace in doing this," he said.

Hindu family of Gulab Yadav has been ensuring that Muslims in the village wake up on time for Sehri ***PHOTO: PTI***

A daily-wage labourer by profession, Yadav spends most of the year working in Delhi. But when Ramzan approaches, he returns to his village to uphold his family's five-decade-old custom.

He hopes to instil a sense of responsibility in his son, just as his father did for him. Every night, he takes young Abhishek along, teaching him the importance of their family's sacred tradition.

"I want my son to continue this after me, just like I did after my father," he said.

After their father passed away, Yadav's elder brother took on the responsibility for a few years.

"But when his eyesight weakened, he had to stop. Since then I have taken over, and I will keep returning every Ramzan to do this," he said.

Yadav's commitment has not gone unnoticed. His efforts are widely appreciated in the village, and his Muslim neighbours regard him with deep respect.

"Waking people up for Sehri is a noble deed. Gulab bhai makes sure that no one is left behind. He spends two hours making rounds through the village, and then he goes around once again to double-check that everyone has eaten. What could be more sacred than this," asked Shafiq, Yadav's neighbour. He also quoted a couplet perfectly capturing Yadav's work: "When both Gita and Quran preach love, why should there be discord between Hindus and Muslims?"

He feels since Ramzan is one of the pillars of Islam, Yadav has set an inspiring example of Hindu-Muslim unity by helping his neighbours observe fast during the holy month.

At a time when government restrictions on loudspeakers at religious sites have changed the way Sehri was traditionally announced, Yadav's personal touch -- knocking on doors, shouting out names and ensuring no one is left behind -- serves as a powerful testament to harmony and coexistence.

His dedication spanning generations is not just a story of tradition, but a lesson for the world -- as Shafiq aptly put. *—PTI*

Sehri is the pre-dawn meal consumed before fasting during Ramadan ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

write to us at salar@salar.news

Musk's involvement with White House spikes attack on Tesla franchises

Cybertrucks set ablaze. Bullets and Molotov cocktails aimed at Tesla showrooms.

Attacks on property carrying the logo of Elon Musk's electric-car company are cropping up across the US and overseas. While no injuries have been reported, Tesla showrooms, vehicle lots, charging stations and privately owned cars have been targeted.

There has been a clear uptick since President Donald Trump took office and empowered Musk to oversee a new Department of Government Efficiency that is slashing government spending. Experts on domestic extremism say it's impossible to know yet if the spate of incidents will balloon into a long-term pattern.

In Trump's first term, his properties in New York City, Washington and elsewhere became a natural place for protest. In the early days of his second term, Tesla is filling that role.

"Tesla is an easy target," said Randy Blazak, a sociologist who studies political violence. "They're rolling down our streets. They have dealerships in our neighborhoods."

Musk critics have organized dozens of peaceful demonstrations at Tesla dealerships and factories across North America and Europe. Some Tesla owners, including a U.S. senator who feuded with Musk, have vowed to sell their vehicles. But the attacks are keeping law enforcement busy.

Musk critics have organized dozens of peaceful demonstrations at Tesla dealerships and factories ***PHOTO: PTI***

Prosecutors in Colorado charged a woman last month in connection with a string of attacks on Tesla dealerships, including Molotov cocktails thrown at vehicles and the words "Nazi cars" spray-painted on a building.

And federal agents in South Carolina last week arrested a man they say set fire to Tesla charging stations near Charleston.

A number of the most prominent incidents have been reported in left-leaning cities in the Pacific Northwest, like Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, where anti-Trump and anti-Musk sentiment runs high.

An Oregon man is facing charges after allegedly throwing several Molotov cocktails at a Tesla store in Salem, then returning another day and shooting out windows. In the Portland suburb of Tigard, more than a dozen bullets were fired at a Tesla showroom last week, damaging vehicles and windows, the second time in a week that the store was targeted.

Four Cybertrucks were set on fire in a Tesla lot in Seattle earlier this month. W itnesses reported a man poured gasoline on an unoccupied Tesla Model S and started a fire on a Seattle street.

In Las Vegas, several Tesla vehicles were set ablaze early Tuesday outside a Tesla service center where the word "resist" was also painted in red across the building's front doors. Authorities said at least one person threw Molotov cocktails — crude bombs filled with gasoline or another flammable liquid — and fired several rounds from a weapon into the vehicles.

"Was this terrorism? Was it something else? It certainly has some of the hallmarks that we might think — the writing on the wall, potential political agenda, an act of violence," Spencer Evans, the special agent in charge of the Las Vegas FBI office, said at a news conference.

Once the darling of the left Tesla has now become a target for them. Helped to viability by a USD465 million federal loan during the Obama administration, the company popularized electric vehicles and proved, despite their early reputation, that they didn't have to be small, stodgy, underpowered and limited in range.

More recently, though, Musk has allied himself with the right. He bought the social network Twitter, renamed it X and erased restrictions that had infuriated conservatives. He spent an estimated USD250 million to boost Trump's 2024 campaign, becoming by far his biggest benefactor.Tesla stock doubled in value in the weeks after Trump's election but has since shed all those gains.

Trump gave a boost to the company when he turned the White House driveway into an electric vehicle showroom.

Tesla did not respond to a request for comment. Musk briefly addressed the vandalism Monday during an appearance on Sen. Ted Cruz's podcast, saying "at least some of it is organized and paid for" by "leftwing organizations in America, funded by leftwing billionaires, essentially."

"This level of violence is insane and deeply wrong," Musk wrote Tuesday on X, sharing a video of burning Teslas in Las Vegas. "Tesla just makes electric cars and has done nothing to deserve these evil attacks."

The progressive group Indivisible, which published a guide for supporters to organize "Musk Or Us" protests around the country, said in a statement that all of its guidance is publicly available and "it explicitly encourages peaceful protest and condemns any acts of violence or vandalism."

Some Tesla owners have resorted to cheeky bumper stickers to distance themselves from their vehicle's new stigma, and perhaps deter would-be vandals. They say things like "I bought this before we knew Elon was crazy," or "I just wanted an electric car. Sorry guys."

The White House has thrown its weight behind Musk, Trump has said Tesla vandalism amounts to "domestic terror," and has threatened retribution, warning that those who target the company are "going to go through hell."

Attorney General Pam Bondi said she'd opened an investigation "to see how is this being funded, who is behind this."

Theresa Ramsdell is the president of the Tesla Owners of Washington state sai"Hate on Elon and Trump all you want — that's fine and dandy, it's your choice," she said. "It doesn't justify ruining somebody's property, vandalizing it, destroying it, setting it on fire. There's other ways to get your voice heard that's more effective."

Someone recently slapped a "no Elon" sticker on the tailgate of her Cybertruck, but she said she doesn't intend to stop driving her Teslas. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Court rejects Rajapaksa plea for security

COLOMBO, 19 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed without a hearing former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's plea for restoring his security contingent. Rajapaksa had filed the fundamental rights petition in January, seeking court intervention after the government slashed his security from over 350 personnel to just 60 in December last year. He claimed his life was under threat as a result of his action to end the three-decade armed campaign by the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) for a separate Tamil homeland. He had cited Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, the Cabinet and the defence establishment as respondents. The legal step by the 80-year-old came in the midst of action by the government to remove him from his official residence. *—PTI*

B'desh arrests Rohingya insurgent group leader

DHAKA, 19 MARCH

Bangladesh Police have arrested the leader of a Rohingya insurgent group who was allegedly involved in carrying out attacks against Myanmar security forces. Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi, the 48-year-old chief of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), was arrested near the capital Dhaka as he was suspected of murder and carried out acts of sabotage, district police chief Praytush Kumar Majumder told the media. Jununi and five of his associates were arrested by the elite Rapid Action Battalion on Tuesday. Another four of his associates were arrested in the central district of Mymensingh, police said. The police first took them into custody for interrogation. Later, a district court approved a 10-day remand for custodial interrogation of the suspects in connection with charges of murder, sabotage, and illegal entry into Bangladesh, police inspector Kaiyum Khan said. *—DW News*

Researcher gets death in China for espionage

BEIJING, 19 MARCH

A Chinese engineer from a research institute has been sentenced to death for selling classified material to foreign spy agencies, China's Ministry of State Security said on Wednesday. The engineer, identified as Liu, from the research institute was working with a "carefully designed plan" to sell intelligence to foreign agencies, the official media here reported, citing the ministry's article. China's national security officials have uncovered the espionage case in which Liu illegally copied and sold state secrets to foreign spy agencies. Liu was convicted of espionage and illegally providing state secrets and has been sentenced to death with lifelong deprivation of political rights, state-run Global Times reported, quoting the ministry's article. Liu was driven by resentment after believing he had been treated unfairly and denied promotions. *—PTI*

GAZA STRIKES 'ONLY THE BEGINNING', SAYS BIBI

At least 14 Palestinians were killed in fresh Israeli airstrikes

JERUSALEM, 19 MARCH

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned that a wave of air strikes that killed hundreds of Palestinians in Gaza overnight is "only the beginning". In a televised address, Netanyahu said that Israeli forces would strike Hamas with "increasing force" and future ceasefire negotiations would "only take place under fire".

"Hamas has already felt the weight of our force in the last 24 hours, and I want to assure you – and them – this is only the beginning," the Israeli leader said.

"We will continue to fight to achieve all our goals of the war – the release of all our hostages, the elimination of Hamas, and the promise that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel."

Meanwhile, at least 14 Palestinians have been killed in overnight and early morning Israeli attacks on Gaza, a day after more than 400 were killed. The deadly Israeli attacks early on Wednesday targeted Khan Younis and Rafah in southern Gaza, as well as Gaza City's Sabra neighbourhood in the north. Tents housing forcibly displaced people were also hit, killing a mother and a child.

Talks on the second stage of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal, which would see the release of nearly 60 remaining Hamas captives and the establishment of a permanent ceasefire, have been at an impasse over Israel's insistence that the first phase be extended until mid-April.

Israel last week rejected an offer by Hamas to release an American-Israeli dual national and the bodies of four dead captives in exchange for the start of second phase talks and an end to the Israeli blockade imposed earlier this month.

The Israeli army claimed that it struck a "Hamas military site". The attacks come after another attack that killed 404 Palestinians shattering a fragile ceasefire with Hamas that had been in place since 19 January. In another development, the leader of a far-right party returned to Israel's government as national security minister. Itamar Ben-Gvir had left coalition in January to protest the ceasefire with Hamas. *—Agencies*

Zelenskyy, Trump to discuss Putin's truce call amid attacks

KYIV, 19 MARCH

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Wednesday said that a vow by Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin not to attack energy infrastructure was "very much at odds with reality" following an overnight barrage of drone strikes across the country.

Zelenskyy said that he would speak with US President Donald Trump later in the day and expected to hear more about the American leader's phone call with Putin about a ceasefire and to discuss the next steps to be taken.

"Even last night, after Putin's conversation with ...

Volodymyr Zelenskyy *PHOTO: PTI*

Trump, when Putin said that he was allegedly giving orders to stop strikes on Ukrainian energy, there were 150 drones launched overnight, including on energy facilities," Zelenskyy said at a news conference in Helsinki with Finnish President Alexander Stubb.

The strikes, which hit civilian areas and damaged a hospital, followed Putin's refusal to back a full 30-day ceasefire during discussions with Trump.

The White House described the call between Trump and Putin as the first step in a "movement to peace" that Washington hopes will include a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea and eventually a full and lasting end to the fighting.

Zelenskyy said that one of the most difficult issues in future negotiations would be the issue of territorial concessions. *—PTI*

Carl Erik Rinsch *PHOTO: X*

HOLLYWOOD DIRECTOR HELD FOR $11M FRAUD

NEW YORK, 19 MARCH

A Hollywood writer-director was arrested on charges that he swindled USD 11M from Netflix for a sci-fi show that never aired, instead steering the cash toward cryptocurrency investments and a series of lavish purchases that included a fleet of Rolls-Royces and a Ferrari.

Carl Erik Rinsch – perhaps best known for directing the film '47 Ronin' – has been charged with wire fraud and money laundering over what federal prosecutors allege was a scheme to defraud the streaming giant. Prosecutors said Netflix had initially paid about USD 44M to purchase an unfinished show called 'White Horse' from Rinsch, but eventually doled out another USD 11 million after he said he needed the additional cash to complete the show.

After losing half of the USD 11M in failed investments, he invested the rest in cryptocurrency market and pocketed the earnings, according to an indictment. *—PTI*

Istanbul mayor held amid terror probe

ISTANBUL, 19 MARCH

Turkish police on Wednesday arrested Istanbul's mayor – a popular opposition leader and key rival of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – and several other prominent figures as part of investigations into alleged corruption and terror links.

The state-run Anadolu Agency said prosecutors issued detention warrants for the mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, and some 100 other people. Among those detained was Imamoglu's close aide, Murat Ongun. Authorities also closed several roads around

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Istanbul and banned demonstrations in the city for four days in an apparent effort to prevent protests following the arrest. Private NTV television reported that two Istanbul district mayors were among those detained. Critics say the crackdown follows significant losses by Erdogan's ruling party in local elections last year amid growing calls for early national elections. Government officials insist that the courts operate independently and reject claims that legal actions against opposition figures are politically motivated. The Istanbul Stock Exchange's main index dropped by 7 per cent over news of the mayor's arrest, triggering a temporary halt to trading to prevent panic selling and stabilise the market. *—PTI*

USAID shutdown likely unconstitutional: Judge

The order came in response to a lawsuit by current and former USAID employees *PHOTO: X*

WASHINGTON DC, 19 MARCH

A federal judge ruled that efforts to shut down the US Agency for International Development (USAID) by billionaire Elon Musk and Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) were likely unconstitutional.

US District Judge Theodore Chuang in Maryland also stopped DOGE from taking any further steps to close the aid agency.

The preliminary ruling requires the restoration of email and computer access to all USAID employees, including those put on administrative leave. However, it does not reverse layoffs at the agency.

The order however, came in response to a lawsuit by current and former USAID employees — one of many filed over the dismantling of the US's primary foreign aid agency.

Chuang also rejected US President Donald Trump's administration's position that Musk is merely his counsel. *—DW News*

63,000 pages of JFK files released

More than 63,000 pages of records related to the 1963 assassination of former president John F Kennedy were released following an order by President Donald Trump. The US National Archives and Records Administration posted to its website on Wednesday roughly 2,200 files containing the documents. The vast majority of the National Archives' collection of over 6M pages related to the assassination had previously been released.

Judge blocks move to end $14B grants

US District Judge Tonya Chutkan temporarily blocked Trump administration from terminating USD 14 billion in grants to three climate groups, saying that the government is "vague". The order prevents the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from ending the USD 20B grant programme. The judge also blocked Citibank, which holds the money on behalf of EPA, from transferring it to the government or anyone else.

BAN ON PRIDE EVENTS

Hungary's anti-LGBTQ+ law sparks protests

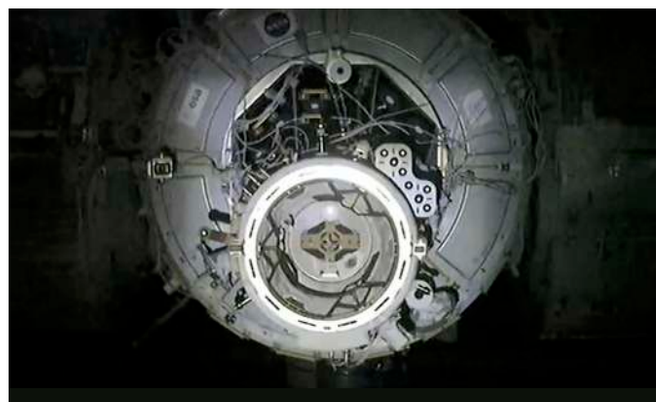
BUDAPEST, 19 MARCH

Hungary on Tuesday passed a new anti-LGBTQ+ law banning Pride events and allowing authorities to use facial recognition software to identify those attending the festivities, leading to a large demonstration on the streets of Budapest.

Several thousands of protesters chanting anti-government slogans gathered outside Hungary's parliament after the vote. They later staged a blockade of the Margaret Bridge over the Danube, blocking traffic and disregarding police instructions to leave the area. The move by Hungarian lawmakers is part of a crackdown on the country's LGBTQ+ community by the nationalist-populist party of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who is an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump.

The measure, which is reminiscent of similar restrictions against sexual minorities in Russia, was passed in a 136-27 vote. The law, supported by Orban's Fidesz party and their minority coalition partner the Christian Democrats, was submitted on Monday. Opposing legislators led a protest in the legislature involving rainbow-coloured smoke bombs.

At the protest, Evgeny Belyakov, a Russian citizen who immigrated to Hungary, said the legislation went at the heart of people's rights to peacefully assemble. *—PTI*



STRANDED IN SPACE FOR 286 DAYS

After spending 9 months in space, astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore are back on Earth. Here is a sneak peek into their mission .

- Williams and Wilmore went on a Boeing Starliner spacecraft to test its maiden crewed voyage in June 2024. They were to return for eight days after conducting research, spacewalks, and repairs aboard the International Space Station (ISS).
- The ISS is a space laboratory and collaboration of five agencies—NASA, ROSCOSMOS, ESA, GAXA, CSA that orbits Earth. It is used for research.
- William's and Wilmore's mission was delayed due to a technical issue with the spacecraft's docking system, making it unsafe to return to Earth. Engineers had to troubleshoot and ensure the spacecraft was safe for re-entry, causing the astronauts to remain on the ISS for 26 more days.
- NASA assigned them to SpaceX's Crew-9 mission. A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launched Crew-9, carrying astronauts Nick Hague and Aleksandr Gorbunov, while reserving two seats for Wilmore and Williams.
- NASA said Crew-9 would stay on ISS until Crew-10 arrived. Crew-10's launch was delayed due to problems with its new SpaceX Dragon spacecraft.
- Crew-10 replaced them on Sunday.

WHAT THEY ATE...

Fresh fruits and vegetables were initially available but ran out within 3 months, after which they survived on pizza, roast chicken, and shrimp cocktails.

Pictures released by NASA showed Williams' hollow cheeks, raising concerns about her health

- This was Williams' third time in space, following her previous missions in 2006 and 2007.
- Wilmore was on his second mission.

Williams being helped out of a SpaceX Dragon spacecraft onboard the recovery ship

NOT THE FIRST ASTRONAUTS TO BE STUCK IN SPACE

- Gennady Padalka has spent a total of 878 days across several missions, the longest accumulated time in space.
- Valeri Polyakov holds the record for the longest stay in space: 437 days aboard Mir space station, from 1994-1995.

CHALLENGES THEY MIGHT FACE AFTER RETURN:

- Weakening of muscles, especially in the legs and back.
- Increased risk of fractures.
- Facial puffiness and possible vision problems.
- Difficulty standing and decreased cardiovascular function.
- Emotional distress and adjustment difficulties.
- Dizziness and nausea.
- Increased risk of infections.
- Difficulty adjusting to light and balance issues.
- Nausea and digestive discomfort.

RESEARCH: AARATI KRISHNA, DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA

Gold rallies ₹700; hits record high of ₹91,950/10g

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Gold prices advanced Rs 700 to reach a new lifetime high of Rs 91,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday on the back of continued buying by jewellers ahead of wedding season, said All India Sarafa Association. Besides, increased tensions in the Middle East and concerns about the US economic slowdown have kept the demand for safe-haven assets intact. The precious metal prices of 99.9 per cent purity soared by Rs 700 to hit a fresh all-time high of Rs 91,950 per 10 grams. It had concluded at Rs 91,250 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Gold prices of 99.5 per cent purity also rallied by Rs 700 to hit a record high of Rs 91,500 per 10 grams. Traders said increased buying by local jewellers to meet festive and wedding season demand and a firm trend in the overseas markets mainly lifted gold prices to this year's highest level.—*PTI*

Rupee rises 12P to settle at 86.44 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

Rising for the fourth straight session, the rupee appreciated 12 paise to close at 86.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, supported by a positive trend in domestic equity markets and lower global crude oil prices. However, a strengthening American currency against major currencies overseas ahead of the US Federal Reserve's interest rate decision capped the sharp gain in the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.60 and touched the intra-day low of 86.68 against the greenback. The unit also hit the day's peak of 86.43 before ending the session at 86.44 (provisional), up 12 paise against its previous close. The domestic currency settled 25 paise higher at 86.56 against the US dollar on Tuesday. —*PTI*

Hyundai, Honda to hike vehicle prices from April

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Hyundai Motor India and Honda Cars India on Wednesday joined the list of automakers planning to hike prices of vehicles from April, second time this year, to partially offset the impact of rising input costs and higher operational expenses. In a statement Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) said it will hike prices of its vehicles by up to 3 per cent effective in April 2025. The quantum of price increase will vary based on the variants and models. The price increase is due to rising input costs, increased commodity prices and higher operational expenses, amongst other reasons, it added. The company had, in January, hiked prices of its vehicles by up to Rs 25,000 across its model range due to an increase in input costs, adverse exchange rate and rise in logistics costs. —*PTI*

iHub Robotics plans to open plant in Kerala

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

iHub Robotics, India's humanoid robotics startup, has raised Rs 4.3 crore in pre-seed funding from US investors, a top company official said on Wednesday. The company is set to establish India's largest humanoid robotics manufacturing facility in Kerala, reinforcing its vision to make India a global leader in robotics and AI-driven automation, CEO Athil Krishna said. "This funding is a significant step toward realising our dream of Physical AI, where intelligent robots seamlessly integrate into industries to enhance human capabilities," Krishna said. With the expansion, the company aims to generate over 150 new jobs in the next two years, driving India's deep-tech revolution forward, Krishna added. iHub Robotics already exports its semi-humanoid robot, Tara Gen-1, to the UAE and Saudi Arabia. —*PTI*

Fitch revises India's growth forecast to 6.5% in FY25-26

Says this is due to the global trade war caused by US policies

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Fitch Ratings has revised India's growth rate for FY25–26 to 6.5 per cent and to 6.3 per cent for FY26-27 in its March Edition of the Global Economic Outlook because of the US-imposed global trade war.

However, the report adds that India is somehow insulated because of its self-sufficiency. "We expect overall GDP growth of 6.5 per cent in FY25–26 and a slight slowdown in growth in FY26–27, to 6.3 per cent. These forecasts are little changed from the December GEO. More aggressive-than-expected US trade policies are an important risk to our forecast, though India is somewhat insulated given its low reliance on external demand."

GDP growth of India recovered in Q4FY25 to 6.2 per cent from 5.4 per cent in Q3FY25 because of increase in private and public spending, including capital spends.

The contribution of agriculture also adds significantly to India's growth – it has increased because of above-average monsoon rains which boosted Kharif crop production.

Fitch says, "For 1Q25, we expect a further pick-up in GDP growth, which would be consistent with GDP growth of 6.3 per cent for the full financial year ending 31 March 2025 (FY24-25)."

The report adds that business confidence in India remains high and lending surveys suggest continued double-digit growth in bank lending to the private sector.

- The report adds that business confidence in India remains high and lending surveys suggest continued double-digit growth in bank lending to the private sector

Additionally, the Union Budget allocation of continued high levels of public capital expenditure is broadly neutral for growth.

Fitch believes that because of these factors along with a reduction in the capital cost because of the rate cut by RBI there will be a pick-up in capital spending for FY25–26 and FY26–27.

In recent months, consumer confidence has edged down, and vehicle sales have eased significantly. Lower inflation figures will boost real incomes, and labour market indicators from government data and PMI survey data point to a steady employment growth.

Moreover, the increased tax-free income and revised tax brackets, will raise post-tax incomes in the hand of consumers will support higher spending and growth. —*ANI*

EYES ON US FED POLICY

Sensex, Nifty rise for 3rd day on RIL, HDFC Bank gains

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Stock markets ended on a positive note on Wednesday, taking their winning momentum to the third day running due to heavy buying in market heavyweights L&T, HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) amid fresh foreign fund inflows.

However, intense selling in blue-chip IT stocks put some pressure on the markets ahead of the US Fed policy decision.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 147.79 points or 0.20 per cent to settle at 75,449.05. During the day, it advanced 267.12 points or 0.35 per cent to 75,568.38. The NSE Nifty rose 73.30 points or 0.32 per cent to 22,907.60.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Zomato, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, IndusInd Bank, Larsen & Toubro, Adani Ports, NTPC, State Bank of India and RIL were among the major gainers.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, ITC, Infosys, Sun Pharma, Maruti, HCL Tech, and Nestle were among the laggards.

"The domestic market continued its positive momentum, as part of the recent correction was justified by valuation. The sustainability of the relief rally depends on a revival in fundamentals. The recovery was broad-based, while metal stocks gained attention after the government decided to impose a tax on steel imports.

"In light of trade uncertainties and growth concerns, today's FED policy and the commentary will be keenly watched by investors to get cues on interest rates," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory, while Tokyo and Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading on a mixed note.—*PTI*

India's BoP to stay in negative: Report

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Despite improvements in the current account deficit, muted net foreign direct investment (FDI) and continued outflow of foreign portfolio investment (FPI) suggest that the overall balance of payments (BoP) will continue to face pressure, said a report by ICICI Bank Global Markets.

Highlighting the impact of FDI and FPI, the report said, the capital account outlook remains subdued due to lower FDI and continued FPI outflows.

Net FDI inflows were just USD 1.2B in April–December 2024, compared to USD 7.8B last year, and net FPI outflows stood at USD 2.0B.

However, the report added that the outlook for the Indian Rupee (INR) has improved, with appreciation seen in the currencies of India's trading partners against the US dollar.

The report forecasts the USD–INR pair to trade in the range of 86.5 to 87.5 in the near term.

According to the February trade data, the country's trade deficit narrowed to a 42-month low of USD 14B in February, which is positive for the country's macroeconomic outlook.

However, non-oil exports, which had been growing for the past 14 months, contracted due to weak global demand and uncertainties around trade wars, the report added.

The report highlighted that the key concern for the country remains the imposition of reciprocal tariffs by the United States. —*ANI*

STRONG URBAN, RURAL DEMAND

FMCG sector expects 6-8% revenue rebound: Crisil

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: X

India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector should see revenue rebound 100 to 200 basis points to 6–8 per cent in the next fiscal year 2025–26, compared with a more modest 5–6 per cent expected rise in the current financial year, Crisil Rating said in a report on Wednesday.

This projected revenue rise is attributable to an expected volume rise (4–6 per cent) due to a gradual recovery in urban and steady rural demand.

Traditional FMCG companies will continue to target acquisitions of direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands, increase adoption of digital channels, and introduce more lower-price packs and products amidst rising competition to support volume growth, which has remained subdued over the past few fiscals.

Another 2 per cent revenue uptick is expected to come from realisations as FMCG companies partly pass on the impact of inflation in key categories such as soaps, biscuits, coffee, hair oil and tea, Crisil said. The pricing actions will be driven by elevated prices of key inputs such as palm oil (a key input for all three segments – F&B, personal care and home care), coffee, copra and wheat.

Operating profitability of FMCG companies is expected to stay flat but healthy at 20–21 per cent in fiscal 2025–26, after a 50–100 bps decline in fiscal 2024–25. "All said, credit profiles of FMCG companies are expected to remain stable," said the rating agency.

Crisil Ratings conducted a study of 82 FMCG companies, accounting for a third of the sector's estimated revenue.

The urban segment accounts for 60 per cent of revenue and rural markets the rest for the FMCGs. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

₹1,500 crore to incentivise low-value UPI transactions

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an incentives scheme worth approximately Rs 1,500 crore to promote UPI transactions below Rs 2,000 for 2024-25, an official statement said.

Under the scheme, the government will bear MDR (Merchant Discount Rate) expense for payment of less than Rs 2,000 made by a person to a merchant.

"The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi today approved the 'Incentive Scheme for promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions Person to Merchant (P2M)' for the financial year 2024-25," the statement said.

The incentive scheme for the promotion of low-value BHIM-UPI transactions (P2M) will be implemented at an estimated outlay of 1,500 crore from 1 April, 2024, to 31 March, 2025.

Only the UPI (P2M) transactions of up to Rs 2,000 for small merchants are covered under the scheme.

"Incentive at the rate of 0.15 per cent per transaction value will be provided for transactions up to Rs 2,000 pertaining to the category of small merchants," the statement said. —*PTI*

MeitY, DFI to launch largest drone innovation challenge

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

Officials of MeitY and DFI at the launch event PHOTO: ANI

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), in collaboration with the Drone Federation India (DFI), launched NIDAR – the National Innovation Challenge for Drone Application and Research – under the SwaYaan initiative.

The launch event was held at Electronics Niketan, MeitY, in the presence of government officials, industry experts and students nationwide through video conferencing, a release added.

The challenge was formally inaugurated by MeitY Secretary S Krishnan, AICTE Chairman Prof T G Sitharam and DFI President Smit Shah, who unveiled the concept video, launched the competition website (https://nidar.org.in), and released the NIDAR Poster and Official Rulebook.

NIDAR is being organised under MeitY's SwaYaan Initiative, which aims to train

- The launch event was held at Electronics Niketan, MeitY, in the presence of government officials, industry experts and students nationwide through video conferencing

as many professionals as possible in the UAS sector by 2027 through 1500+ nationwide activities encompassing five major technical areas, the release added.

This initiative is part of the Government of India's vision to make India a global drone hub by 2030. The DFI, which represents over 550 drone companies and over 5,500 drone pilots, will support participating students by providing mentorship and industry exposure —*PTI*

Gems, jewellery exports fall 23.49% in February: GJEPC

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

India's gems and jewellery exports declined by 23.49 per cent in February at Rs 21,085.030 crore compared to the same month of last year following a continued dip in demand in the US and China, the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said on Wednesday. The overall exports of gems and jewellery stood at Rs 26,268.6 crore in the corresponding period of 2024, it said.

Gems and jewellery exports from April 2024 till February 2025, showed a dip of 13.43 per cent at Rs 2,17,148.26 crore compared to Rs 2,46,105.96 crores for the same period previous year. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

HAILS VACCINE SUCCESS

India will lead AI innovation worldwide: Gates

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Microsoft's former CEO Bill Gates on Wednesday hailed India's achievements in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), adding that the country's leadership in AI will drive innovation worldwide.

Addressing an event "Future Forward", an action-driven forum that brings together global industry leaders, policymakers, investors, and changemakers to drive real-world collaboration and impact, the Gates Foundation Chairman said, "Similar to how DPI (Digital Public Infrastructure) has garnered global attention, India's leadership in AI will drive innovation worldwide."

Gates said that he's spoken to Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw to ensure the participation of India in the upcoming AI Summit to benefit countries, especially from the Global South.

Explaining the benefits, Gates said that AI will accelerate advancements in areas like mRNA vaccines, agricultural innovation, and the fight against malnutrition.

Gates also commended the country's vaccine production capabilities. Through partnerships with companies like Serum Institute, Bharat Biotech, and IRI, India has played a key role in producing affordable, high-quality vaccines that are used globally.

"Without Indian innovation, vaccines wouldn't be as affordable or accessible," he added.

He also met Union Health Minister JP Nadda and reviewed the collaboration between the government and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in the healthcare sector.

Gates also held discussions with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and predictive analytics to improve service delivery in the fields of healthcare, education, agriculture, and employment generation.

In a post on X, Nadda highlighted the strides India has made in areas such as maternal health, immunisation, and sanitation with the Gates Foundation's support. —*PTI*

India focusing on core trade issues in FTAs: Comm Secy

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

India is focusing on core trade issues such as import duty and non-tariff barriers in the proposed free trade agreements (FTAs) for faster outcomes from these negotiations, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Wednesday.

This approach is important as sometimes it takes "so much time" to conclude negotiations for these agreements and because of that businesses lose interests. "...the experience has been that when we look at these free trade agreements, sometimes they are so much time-taking that people lose interest, the businesses lose interest, Barthwal said.

"So, we are also reviewing some of these issues in the department (of commerce) as well, as we are talking to our partners who are doing FTAs with us that why can't we first look at the core trade issues, and even if it is early tranche, or even if it is first phase of that comprehensive agreement, but let there be some kind of outcome which should come out of these negotiations. So we are taking that approach, that let us first focus on the core trade issues," Barthwal said at CII's India-LAC (Latin America and Caribbean) Business Conclave in the national capital. —*ANI*

Doping education in schools: Sports Minister

NEW DELH, 19 MARCH

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday called for the inclusion of doping education in schools and launching awareness campaigns in rural areas to give impetus to the fight against the menace. Delivering his keynote address at the NDTL Annual Conference-2025 on 'Anti-Doping Science: Innovations and Challenges', Mandaviya reaffirmed the government's commitment to promoting clean and fair competition in sports. The conference organized by the National Dope Testing Laboratory provided a vital platform for scientists, coaches, physical education professionals, sports federations, and students to engage in insightful discussions on the latest advancements and challenges in anti-doping science. all athletes are well-informed about anti-doping regulations, a release from the Press Information Bureau said.—*PTI*

Abhishek remains in 2nd place in T20I rankings

DUBAI, 19 MARCH

Indian swashbuckler Abhishek Sharma and mystery spinner Varun Chakaravarthy continued to hold on to their career-best number two position in the latest ICC T20I chart for batters and bowlers respectively. Hardik Pandya leads the all-rounders' list with 252 points ahead of Nepal's Dipendra Singh Airee and Australian Marcus Stoinis. Hard-hitting batter Tilak Varma and India's T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav occupied the fourth and fifth slot respectively in the rankings released on Wednesday. Australia's Travis Head leads the chart for batters with 856 rating points with England's Phil Salt placed third with 815 points. Abhishek has 829 points, Varma has 804, and Suryakumar has 739 points. In the bowling list headed by West Indies' Akeal Hosein, Chakaravarthy is just one point behind at 706, and ahead of England leg-spinner Adil Rashid, Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga, and Australian leggie Adam Zampa.—*PTI*

Badminton: Ayush qualifies for Swiss Open

LONDON, 19 MARCH

Indian shuttlers Ayush Shetty and S Sankar Muthuswamy Subramanian advanced to the main draw of the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament with commanding performances in the qualifiers here on Tuesday. Shetty eased past Cholan Kayan of England 21-12, 21-15 in 42 minutes to secure his spot in the main round. The 19-year-old Indian will face Kenta Nishimoto of Japan in his opening-round clash on Wednesday. Meanwhile, Muthuswamy had to battle through two rounds, first beating China's Yuehang Wang 21-13, 21-4 in just 23 minutes before overcoming compatriot Tharun Mannepalli 21-7, 21-10 in the final qualifying round.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Grohs makes her first start since treatment for tumor

MUNICH, 19 MARCH

Goalkeeper Maria-Luisa "Mala" Grohs made the most of her first start for Bayern Munich since returning from treatment for a malignant tumor. The 23-year-old Grohs saved a penalty from Lyon's Lindsey Heaps and went on to make a host of important saves during the teams' first-leg women's Champions League quarterfinal on Tuesday. She was unable to prevent Bayern from losing 2-0 to goals from Tabitha Chawinga and Melchie Dumornay, but her performance gives the Bavarian team some hope ahead of the second leg in Lyon on 26 March.—*PTI*

All-rounder to find a place under Impact Player rule: Pandya

BCCI extended the rule to at least the 2027 edition

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya on Wednesday said now that the contentious Impact Player rule has been extended by three years, a cricketer has to be a pure all-rounder to find a place in the starting eleven.

The rule allows a team to replace a player from their playing XI at a later stage of the match. The teams bring in a batting or bowling specialist as the situation demands.

The BCCI extended the rule to at least the 2027 edition despite reservations from

Hardik Pandya PHOTO: PTI

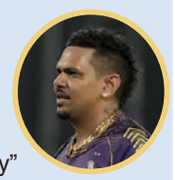
leading Indian players, including Rohit Sharma who said the Impact Player strategy was holding back the development of Indian all-rounders with teams replacing them with an extra batter or bowler during the game.

Shubman Gill believes a successful captain needs to keep his batting separate from leadership, as mixing the two is never in the best interest of the team.

Gill took over the mantle of the Gujarat Titans from Hardik Pandya last season, and his start was an inauspicious one, with the team finishing a lowly eighth after playing back-to-back finals in 2022 and 2023. —*PTI*

We have to bowl well in tandem: Narine

Fresh from his exploits in India's triumphant Champions Trophy campaign, Varun Chakravarthy will be a key component of Kolkata Knight Riders' spin attack with his element of "uncertainty" in the upcoming IPL, veteran Sunil Narine said on Wednesday. The West Indian spin-bowling all-rounder, heading into his 14th IPL season with KKR, believes Chakravarthy's ability to keep batsmen guessing would be key to their bowling unit's success.



SKY TO CAPTAIN MI IN IPL OPENER AGAINST CSK

MUMBAI, 19 MARCH

Suryakumar Yadav will captain Mumbai Indians in their opening IPL match against Chennai Super Kings on Sunday as regular skipper Hardik Pandya will be forced to sit out due to a one-match suspension for over-rate offenses committed by the team last season.

Suryakumar is the national T20 captain and recently led the side to a 4-1 triumph over England at home. However, his batting form wasn't particularly impressive and he managed just 38 runs in the five outings during the series. "Surya leads India as well. When I am not there he is the ideal choice," Pandya said during MI's pre-season press conference here. MI head coach Jayawardene said the BCCI has communicated the one-match ban on Pandya to the team owing to three slow over-rate violations by his team last season. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

NO IV DRIP OR MEDICAL GEAR AT MARADONA DEATH SCENE: POLICE

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

A policeman who was among the first on the scene of Diego Maradona's death four years ago, told a court Tuesday he saw no "medical items" in the room where the football legend was receiving post-operative care at home.

Officer Lucas Farias testified in the trial of seven health professionals accused of homicide for their alleged role in what prosecutors have described as the "horror theatre" of Maradona's final days.

Farias said he "didn't see medical items in the room. I didn't see serums that I think should be part of home hospitalization," referring to an intravenous drip.

Farias was one of four police officers to give evidence Tuesday, a week after the trial opened in San Isidro in the northern suburbs of Buenos Aires. "What first caught my attention about Diego Maradona was his face-up position with an abdomen so swollen it seemed about to explode," said Farias. "I was shocked to see Maradona in that state, I never thought I'd find myself faced with that image." Maradona died on November 25, 2020, aged 60, while recovering at home from brain surgery for a blood clot, after decades of battling cocaine and alcohol addictions.It was determined he died of heart failure and acute pulmonary edema, a condition where fluid accumulates in the lungs. On trial are a neurosurgeon, a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a medical coordinator, a nursing coordinator, a doctor, and a night nurse accused of being criminally negligent in the care they provided to the footballer in his final days. —*PTI*

Chhetri scores on return as Blue Tigers beat Maldives 3-0

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

Sunil Chhetri scored on his international comeback as India outplayed the Maldives 3-0 in their friendly match at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Shillong, Meghalaya on Wednesday.

Rahul Bheke drew the first blood through a superb header in the 35th minute to put India in the lead. It was another impressive header, this time from Liston Colaco in the 66th minute, that doubled the team's lead.

Then came the much-awaited goal from India captain Sunil Chhetri, who also was a header, in the 76th minute. This was the first match for Indian football legend Chhetri post making a retirement U-turn.

It was a perfect boost for India before they started their campaign in the Athe FC Asian Cup qualification third round with a match against Bangladesh on 25 March. —*PTI*

SUNIL CHHETRI PHOTO: PTI

Churchill Brothers beat Dempo 3-1

Churchill Brothers remained in contention to win the I-League title with a commanding 3-1 victory against Dempo SC in a highly-anticipated Goan Derby here on Wednesday.The Red Machines led 2-0 at the break.Dempo defender Mohamed Ali's (26' own goal) put Churchill Brothers in the lead. Lekay's performance saw him climb to third in the league's goal-scoring charts, taking his tally to 11 goals for the season.

NCA to COE: Name has changed but issues remain same

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

The National Cricket Academy has been rechristened to Centre of Excellence (COE) as it found a new home in Bengaluru but it appears to be a case of "old wine in a new bottle", with still no clarity on injury management timelines for specific players.

Whether it is India's No.1 pacer Jasprit Bumrah or the country's fastest bowler Mayank Yadav, the COE has maintained an iron curtain regarding the timeline and process of injury management.

There used to be a running joke about the COE for injured players a few years back: "You can check in any time of the year but you can't leave".From injury management (by the physios) in COE's Sports Science and Medical team to rehabilitation and injury prevention (by Strength and Conditioning coach) to return to play (handled by bowling coaches cum biomechanics experts), a player goes through a complicated three-way process.

For any and every injury and subsequent 'Return To Play', there are timelines, which vary from player to player.But not being able to even provide a rough estimation of a player's return hasn't amused anyone related to Indian cricket."Over the past year, in most injury and rehabilitation cases, the medical team has simply stated 'clinically fit. —*PTI*

Players group founded by Djokovic files antitrust suit against tennis organisers

MIAMI GARDENS, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Calling the groups in charge of professional tennis "a cartel," the players' association co-founded by Novak Djokovic filed an antitrust lawsuit against the women's and men's tours, the International Tennis Federation and the sport's integrity agency in federal court in New York.

The suit by the Professional Tennis Players' Association says the organizations that run the sport hold "complete control over the players' pay and working conditions" and their setup constitutes "textbook violations of state and federal law" that "immunize professional tennis from ordinary market forces and deny professional tennis players and other industry participants their right to fair competition."

The lawsuit seeks a jury trial and wants players to gain access to more earnings, arguing that the governing bodies that oversee the four Grand Slam tournaments Wimbledon, the U.S. Open, the French Open, and the Australian Open and other professional events "cap the prize money tournaments award and limit players' ability to earn money off the court."

On top of the case in U.S. District Court, the PTPA made filings with the European Commission in Brussels and the Competition Markets Authority in London.

"There is a complete and utter lack of competition that exists in professional tennis, and we believe by filing these actions, we will ultimately inject the kind of competition that will be fair to the players, to the fans, and actually to the people (who) operate the system," said Jim Quinn, a lawyer working with the PTPA. —*PTI*

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Kalita stopping Lovlina, other Assam boxers from competing: Singh

NEW DELHI, 19 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh on Wednesday alleged that Olympic bronze-winner Lovlina Borgohain is being stopped from participating in the National Championships by recently-suspended BFI secretary general Hemanta Kalita.

In an "emergency press conference" here, Singh said that the Tokyo Games medallist in the 69kg category is keen to participate in the marquee domestic event starting Thursday in Greater Noida but has been asked to withdraw by Kalita.

Kalita, who has been found guilty of financial mismanagement in an inquiry conducted by former Delhi High Court judge Sudhir Kumar Jain, holds the secretary's position in the Assam body.

"Assam is discouraging players from participating in the women's Nationals. Lovlina has recorded a video of support. But officers have received a call that she has been asked by Hemanta Kalita not to participate. Because she owes a lot to Assam boxing, she is reconsidering her participation," Singh said.

Kalita has not immediately responded to the charge.

He was among the four candidates for the president's post in the soon-to-be-held BFI polls but his nomination was rejected because he needed to undergo a cooling-off period after serving two terms, in different roles, in the body. —*PTI*

ADANI INVITATIONAL GOLF C'SHIP

Cricket legend Kapil Dev and Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani during a meeting in Ahmedabad PHOTO: PTI

CONCACAF NATIONS LEAGUE

Coaches hope no political undertones this weekend

INGLEWOOD, 19 MARCH

The coaches of the four teams playing for the CONCACAF Nations League title this week think soccer should remain separate from the geopolitical events currently roiling relations among their nations.

Speaking two days before the tournament's semifinal matches at SoFi Stadium, U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino and Canada counterpart Jesse Marsch on Tuesday downplayed the political impact on the latest major international sporting competition to be staged amid President Donald Trump's rhetoric and policies, including his tariff war with Mexico and Canada.

"I think we can't mix political things with sport," Pochettino said. "It's not because I don't want to talk. I have my ideas. But I represent the federation, and I (don't) want to talk about politics."

United States coach Mauricio Pochettino PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

The U.S. faces Panama in the first Nations League semifinal match on Thursday before Canada takes on Mexico in the nightcap. The championship match is Sunday night.

"I'm not going to get political right now," said Marsch, a Wisconsin native. "I think I've made my statements clear and known.

I will say that I do think from watching the 4 Nations in hockey, you can see that the climate for sports in North America has been elevated for national teams. I'm hopeful that this tournament can be the best reflection of our societies, in that we don't have to waste time booing anthems and getting caught up in politics, and we can just focus on the players and the teams and supporting the love of the game, and then whatever your nationality is, that you can support your team all the way." —*PTI*

Caicedo stars as Real Madrid beat Arsenal 2-0

LONDON, 19 MARCH

Linda Caicedo shined on a rainy evening in the Spanish capital as Real Madrid beat Arsenal 2-0 in the first leg of the women's Champions League quarterfinals. The 20-year-old Colombia star opened the scoring and proved a constant source of torment for the Arsenal defenders. Substitute Athenea grabbed the second goal late to put the Spanish side in a promising position to reach the semi-finals. The second leg of their quarterfinal will be played in London next Wednesday.

Caicedo capitalized on Arsenal defender Leah Williamson's botched effort to cut out Signe Bruun's pass when she took a couple of strides forward to hold off Arsenal's Emily Fox and fired the ball inside the left post in the 22nd minute.

Beth Mead went closest for Arsenal before the break.

Madrid suffered a blow in the 63rd when Melanie Leupolz went off with an apparent right knee injury after kicking the ball. The 16-year-old Irune Dorado went on in the German midfielder's place. Arsenal responded with a period of sustained pressure, albeit without reward, and Athenea scored on a counter-attack in the 82nd. Arsenal goalkeeper Manuela Zinsberger got her hand to the ball but couldn't keep Athenea's powerful shot out.—*PTI*